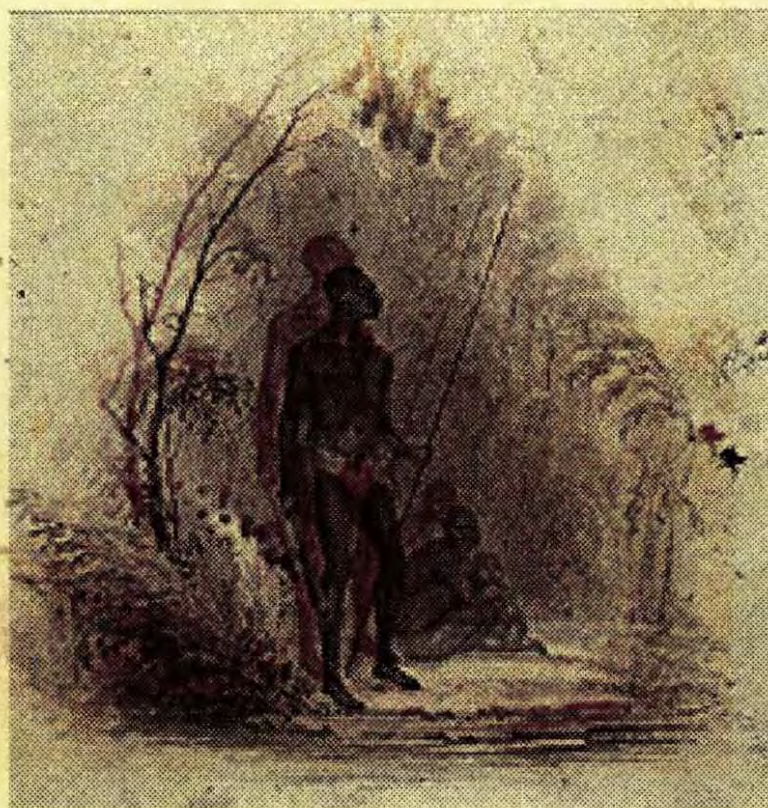


Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide

by

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submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide

As the title indicates this study is restricted to those Aboriginal tribes¹ located in the North West region of Tasmania. This approach enables the regional character and diversity of Aboriginal communities to be brought into focus; it also facilitates an examination of the unique process of dispossession that took place in the North West region, an area totally under the control of the Van Diemen's Land Company (VDL Co). Issues dealing with entitlement to ownership and sovereignty will be established by an examination of the structure and function of traditional Aboriginal Societies in the region, as well as the occupation and use they made of their lands. Early contact history with the Europeans is examined to demonstrate that there was a real possibility of developing productive relationships with the indigenous inhabitants at the time the VDL Co took up their land grants.

The character of the VDL Co manager Edward Curr, his role in the development of the VDL Co and his harsh treatment of those under his authority, including the Aborigines is also an important area of study. While Company Directors were prepared to countenance the dispossession of the Aborigines and consequent destruction of their culture, Curr was content to preside over their physical destruction. This thesis will demonstrate that Edward Curr persistently ignored instructions from his Directors to the contrary and created, fostered and supported an ethos that encouraged the systematic eradication of the Aboriginal population on

¹ See pages 7-8 for a discussion on the use of the terms bands and tribes.

allocated Company lands. In 1834, after only eight years under the care of Curr's administration, less than one sixth of the original Aboriginal inhabitants had survived to be taken into exile by the Friendly Mission.

Robinson's Friendly Mission provided the main physical contact between the North West Aborigines and Arthur's administration. Thus the activities of the Friendly Mission and its role in removing many of the Aborigines, by force in many cases, is detailed, as is their treatment and condition at the Wybalenna Establishment.

The history of the North West Aboriginal tribes will continue by tracing the events and experiences that followed the exile to Flinders Island and Oyster Cove, concluding with the death in 1857 of the last survivor of the North West population. It will be established that the genocide perpetrated against these tribes, was initiated as part of local VDL Co policy, a process exacerbated through colonial administrative expediency and brought to completion by neglect.

Finally, there is a brief review of the popular ideologies concerning race, current during the period under study and the extent to which these ideas moulded attitudes and policies relating to Aborigines both in the North West and in general.

Acknowledgements

The first reference in this section naturally goes to my Supervisor, Professor Henry Reynolds in appreciation of his support, direction and guidance throughout this whole process. I am indebted to Char Wylie, a proud descendent of Worete.moete.yenner, for her enthusiastic support and encouragement, as well as to Sue McDonald, Librarian and custodian of the Burnie Library Local History Collection for her cheerful help and assistance. I am also obliged to Brian Rollins, Land Surveyor and Secretary of the Burnie History Society who kindly mapped the Aboriginal sites at Freestone Cove.

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Introduction

An important aim of this thesis will be to dispel any notion that Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) was *Terra nullius*, or even seriously considered so by the colonial authorities at the time of European settlement.¹ Consequently, the British settlement commencing in 1803 constituted a territorial invasion rather than the simple process of occupation as claimed under the British law of possessions at the time. As C.Clark observed:

Colonies, are acquired by conquest, by cession under treaty, or by occupancy. By occupancy, where an uninhabited country is discovered by British subjects, and is upon such discovery adopted or recognised by the British Crown as part of its possessions. In case a colony be acquired by occupancy the law of England, then in being, is immediately and ipso facto in force in the new settlement New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land were acquired by discovery or simple occupation.²

In 1889 the Privy Council provided a legal definition of '*Terra nullius*' that granted official approval at the highest level for the claim that in 1788 Australia had been "practically unoccupied, without settled inhabitants".³ Thus Australia's indigenous people became subjects of the Crown answerable to British law whilst enjoying few of the rights of citizenship normally granted to British nationals. The wholesale acquisition of their entire lands by the Crown meant that any attempts on their part to protect hunting grounds or resist dispossession could only be viewed under British

¹ A position made largely untenable by extensive French anthropological studies of the Aboriginal population made prior to British occupation.

² Justice Willis quoting the leading British authority on colonial law in a judgment on an Aboriginal offender in New South Wales see Reynolds, Henry. *Dispossession*. St Leonards, Allen & Unwin. 1989. p.69

³ *ibid.*, p.68

law as criminal activities.⁴ Rendered powerless, without the protection of either treaty or civic rights, the interests of the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land were simply swept aside in the rush to establish the Colony.

A popular and often cited authority on the occupation of 'practically unoccupied' lands was the *Law of Nations* written by the Swiss jurist Emmerich deVattel. Selective extracts taken from the *Law of Nations* were commonly used at the time to justify colonial expansion. In 1834 Charles Clark paraphrased a passage from Vattel in his *Summary of Colonial Law* "...the people of Europe, too closely pent up at home, finding land of which savages stood in no particular need, and of which they made no actual and constant use were lawfully entitled to take possession of it, and settle it with colonies".⁵ However, Clark neglected to mention that in the same passage Vattel went on to express his admiration for the Puritan settlers of New England who paid the 'savages' for the lands they wished to occupy.⁶ This example of a New England land transaction contained two elements that Vattel considered praiseworthy, consent from the Indians and moderation in land demands on the part of the Puritans. These were principles quite alien to the British Colonial Office, in fact Vattel provided little support for those who wished to "...take to themselves more land than they have need of or can inhabit and cultivate".⁷

The British claim that Tasmania was settled by occupation was to create many problems for Arthur's administration in dealing with the all too present Aborigines.

⁴ Ryan, Lyndall. *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (2nd Ed). St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin. 1996. p.73

⁵ Reynolds, Henry. *op.cit.*, p.70

⁶ Vattel de, Emer. *The Law of Nations or The Principles Of Natural Law*. 2 Vols. (1758). New York, Oceana Publications Inc. 1964. pp. 85-86

⁷ *ibid.*, p.85

The difficulty in reconciling the fiction of *Terra nullius* with the reality faced by settlers on the ground became all too evident as Aboriginal resistance to dispossession gradually stiffened to the point of all out war by 1826. The anomalous position that confronted Arthur was recognised by Earl Bathurst, the Secretary of State, a year earlier in 1825, when he advised Lieutenant General Darling⁸ that when hostile incursions from the natives could not be prevented then it would be necessary "...to oppose force by force, and to repel such aggressors in the same manner, as if they proceeded from subjects of an accredited state".⁹

Lacking clear guidelines and the opportunity to negotiate a formal treaty with the Aboriginal tribes, Arthur's administration was soon enmeshed in public controversy following a number of contradictory and ineffective policy decisions. These issues became the focus of a great deal of debate, much of it acrimonious as the Colonial press picked up on obvious injustices such as those that came to the fore during the hanging of two Aborigines, Jack and Dick in 1826. Andrew Bent, the proprietor of the *Colonial Times* used the occasion of the execution to focus attention on the ridiculous charade of treating Aborigines engaged in war of resistance as if they were Englishmen committing acts of domestic crime. As Bent pointed out, if the Aborigines had resisted British landings with violence at the first instance instead showing friendship:

...we should have been then supposed to have acquired possession by the right of conquest; and of course these poor blacks would then have been subjected to all the consequences which, on reference to Vattel, Grotius, and other writers, on

⁸ It was made clear to Arthur that these instructions also applied to his governance when Darling, en route to replace Brisbane showed him the Despatch in Hobart in 1825. Arthur also tabled the Despatch at an Executive Council meeting on 30 October, 1828

⁹ Chapman, Peter (ed.) *Historical Records of Australia. Resumed Series III. Volume VII*, Canberra. Australian Government Publishing Service. 1997. pp. 627-628

international law, might appear to attach. What would then, have been the result? Why that, instead of their being subjected to our law, we, the invaders, would have been subjected to theirs!¹⁰

John West commenting on the case some years later, recalled public support for Bent's position at the time: "It was not clear, to many, that the natives were legally accountable, or that their punishment was just".¹¹ The Colonial administration employed a number of strategies in its attempts to facilitate the physical eviction of the Aborigines from their lands. However, the main focus of this paper will centre on those initiatives directed towards the North West region of Tasmania through the agency of Robinson and the Friendly Mission from 1830 to 1834. The primary function of the Friendly Mission in the North West being to organise and effect the removal of the remaining Aboriginal inhabitants from their tribal lands to permanent exile on Flinders Island.

The Clergy, long practised at reconciling their theology to accommodate the slave trade were able to discount the principles raised by Vattel by invoking Divine support for British Colonial expansion. The Reverend Thomas Atkins was moved to give expression to a prevailing dogma following a visit to Van Diemen's Land in 1837 declaring that:

It was a Universal law in the Divine government that when savage tribes came into collision with civilised races of men, the savages disappeared. This was because they had not complied with the divine conditions for survival - 'For God blessed them, and god said unto them, Be Fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it'.¹²

¹⁰ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser* (Hobart) Vol.11. No.526. 2 June, 1826

¹¹ West, John. *The History of Tasmania*. 1852. Australian Classics Edition. Shaw. A.G.L. (ed.) London, Angus & Robertson Publishers. 1971. p.272

¹² Morris, James. *Pax Britannica*. London, Folio Society. 1992. Vol.1. p.384

However, Atkins contribution reveals more about nineteenth century attitudes towards race than the nature of laws emanating from a Divine government. These attitudes contributed much towards the indifference and brutality that often accompanied the eviction of Tasmanian Aborigines from their lands. Some of the ideological factors that contributed to the official and unofficial treatment of Aborigines prior to 1850s will be discussed in the Post Script. The prevailing views regarding race were largely based upon the need to justify England's two hundred year old involvement in the slave trade. Given that slavery was still legal at the time of settlement it is not surprising that the profitability of one of the first industries established in Van Diemen's Land, the sealing industry, was underpinned by the free labour provided by enslaved Aboriginal women.¹³ This practice in many ways was in keeping with the development of concurrent land based enterprises in the Colony which were also based upon forced labour, the convict system. Although Aboriginal communities in the North East corner of the colony bore the brunt of the sealer's raids for women, communities living along the North West coast were not immune from their activities. The impact of the sealers' raids will be discussed as well as the activities of other early travellers to the region, mainly explorers, surveyors and adventurers. The observations and experiences of many of these early visitors will reveal that the attitude of the Aborigines towards Europeans appeared to be one of reserved curiosity with no evidence of hostility or aggression. This was an environment conducive to the establishment of a friendly discourse. The opportunity was lost as the sporadic raids of sealers rendered the coastline of the North West a place of constant danger for Aboriginal families. These sea borne raids that could occur at any time or place along the coast were especially disruptive to the lifestyle of

¹³ Kociumbas, Jan. *The Oxford History of Australia. Volume 2.* Melbourne. Oxford University Press. 1992. p.101

maritime communities reliant on the coast for food and ease of travel. It was a situation that placed North West tribes in a particularly vulnerable position when faced with the organised and methodical process of dispossession embarked upon by the Van Diemen's Land Company.

During the course of examining the lifestyle of the North West Aborigines, a number of widespread beliefs relating to Aborigines in Tasmania generally will be questioned. Namely the notions that Aborigines couldn't make fire, didn't eat scale fish and were in the habit of trading their women to the sealers for dogs, seals or to establish political relationships. While the latter practice may have taken place in the North East of the colony in some limited instances, it was certainly not widespread. This notion has produced some strange interpretations of the conditions that these Aboriginal women imprisoned on the remote islands of Bass Strait endured. A recent Tasmanian Government paper¹⁴ found fit to refer to Vansittart Island as the "...centre of the Aboriginal sealing community..." in the 1820s and 1830s, a statement akin to referring to African farming communities in Virginia in the 1700s.

The arrival of the Van Diemen's Land Company (VDL Co) in 1826 marked the beginning of the end for those Aboriginal tribes occupying the 250,000 acres of land that constituted the Company's original grant. The VDL Co was initially established in London for the purpose of breeding Merino and Saxon sheep to supply the growing demands of the English wool industry. With this end in mind, the VDL Co advance party wasted no time on arrival at Circular Head in despatching company surveyors throughout the region in order to identify suitable grasslands and pastures for the

¹⁴ *Government Response to Legislative Council Committee Report on Aboriginal Lands.* Hobart. Tasmanian Parliamentary Library. August 2000. p.20

sheep. Extensive tracts of grasslands were soon discovered at Woolnorth and the Hampshire and Surrey Hills (see Appendix One). However, these were not naturally occurring features of the landscape; they were Aboriginal hunting grounds created over many generations by firestick farming. Aboriginal communities were soon placed in an impossible position with access to coastal food supplies severely curtailed through the presence of marauding sealers and inland hunting grounds denied to them by VDL Co shepherds. The VDL Co Court of Directors in London, perhaps anticipating the seriousness of the situation, wrote to Curr urging that no effort be spared to establish peaceful relationships with the natives and recommended the example of the Australian Agricultural Company in New South Wales as a suitable model:

If they could be taught, as Mr Dawson has taught them that there are good Englishmen as well as bad, and whilst their land is taken possession of, their persons could be protected and their comforts increased. These poor wretches may still be brought into the social order and may add to the safety and prosperity of settlers. The Court will at some future period draw your attention again to this interestingly important subject and in the meantime they have to request you will impress upon the minds of everyone that all will be done to endeavour to win them by kindness and by such small presents as will be most acceptable to them and will excite them to friendship and usefulness.¹⁵

The Directors hoped to justify the action of robbing the Aborigines of their land with the integration of the lives of the "poor wretches" into future Company plans. The Despatch also contained the suggestion that with a little time and well directed effort, the Aborigines might prove to be an alternative source of cheap labour to that provided by reluctant convicts and unreliable indentured servants. Their local

¹⁵ Outward Despatch No.64. Court to Curr. 1st August 1828. Outward Letter Despatches 1825 to 1835. Reel.4. p.204. Hellyer Library. Burnie.

manager however, shared none of his Director's scruples and had no intention of diverting valuable time and resources into distractions such as attending to the well being and survival of the original inhabitants. While Company Directors were prepared to countenance the dispossession of the Aborigines and consequent destruction of their culture, Curr was willing to preside over their physical destruction. This thesis will demonstrate that Edward Curr persistently ignored instructions from his Directors to the contrary and created, fostered and supported an ethos that encouraged the systematic eradication of the Aboriginal population on allocated Company lands. In 1834, after only eight years under the care of Curr's administration, less than one sixth of the original Aboriginal inhabitants had survived to be taken into exile by the Friendly Mission.

Unfortunately, not long after the VDL Co's establishment, Curr instructed his employees to have no communication with the Aborigines at all "...friendly or otherwise..." a directive that has compounded the difficulties associated with introducing an Aboriginal voice into the thesis.¹⁶ Unlike the records of Robert Dawson and the Australian Agricultural Company in New South Wales, the VDL Co records contain virtually no information regarding Aboriginal culture, lifestyle or make any reference to tribal groupings or names of prominent individuals.

Exile, for those who were removed to Flinders Island, provided only a short term respite at best. Placed in an alien environment and amongst traditional enemies, these people fared worse than those from tribes with a history of extended contact with European settlers. Few remained alive to make the final transfer to Oyster

¹⁶ see Chapter 4, p.107.

Cove in 1847. Although records kept at Oyster Cove were poorly maintained, it is clear that the death of Adam¹⁷ in 1857, marked the end of a people who had survived and prospered for thousands of years in North West Tasmania, just thirty one years after their lands were first invaded.

¹⁷ Adam was born in captivity on Flinders Island in 1838.

Chapter One

Land Occupancy and Use

The Children of the Mist

Through the valleys, softly creeping
 'Mid the tree-tops, tempest-tossed,
See the cloud-forms seeking, peeping
 For the loved ones that are lost,
Not for storm or sunshine resting,
 Will they slacken or desist,
Or grow weary in their questing
 For the Children of the Mist.

Where are now those children hiding?
 Surely they will soon return,
In the gorge again abiding
 'Mid the myrtle and the fern.
Ah! the dusky forms departed
 Never more will keep their tryst,
And the clouds, alone, sad-hearted,
 Mourn the Children of the Mist.

E'en the wild bush-creatures, scattered,
 Ere they die renew their race,
And the pine, by levin shattered,
 Leaves an heir to take its place.
Though each forest thing, forth stealing,
 Year by year the clouds have kissed,
Vainly are those white arms feeling
 For the Children of the Mist.

Dead the race, beyond awakening.
 Ere its task was well begun;
Human hearts that throbbed to breaking
 Are but dust beneath the sun.
Past all dreams of vengeance-wreaking,
 Blown wher'er the tempests list.

But the cloud-forms still are seeking
 For the Children of the Mist.

Anonymous¹

¹ J.S. In *Tasman's Land, Gleams and Dreams of the Great North West*. Melbourne. Allan Morrison. p.11

'Children of the Mist' was collected in the North West district by the writer of *In Tasman's Land, Gleams and Dreams of the Great North West*. The book, undated, was signed J.S., possibly James Stirling a former Engineer and Manager of the Emu Bay Railway Company, the commissioners of the work. The verse, probably penned by an early settler takes the form of a lament for a people the author was unlikely to have ever met. The original occupiers and users of the land in question were those people who made up what is now commonly referred to as the North West tribes. The indigenous inhabitants of the North West had long been removed from their lands by the time the first waves of settlers arrived in the district to lease their holdings from the Van Diemen's Land Company in 1843. However, these early pioneers could not have failed to notice the evidence of thousands of years of occupation left by the previous inhabitants. Signs that included campsites, identifiable by the tell tale circular impressions left by native huts, and the extensive middens found up and down the North West coastline. The lament cloaks its subject with an air of mystery in keeping with the questions these sites posed to those settlers of an inquisitive nature. Who were these people? and how did they live and sustain life throughout their thousands of years of total isolation? This chapter will address those questions with a detailed examination of the ethnographic and archaeological evidence that relates specifically to the region.

An advantage in adopting a regional focus is that the danger of generalising discrete habits and customs of different tribes throughout the State may be minimised. Cultural traits that were specific to tribes included hair styles, differing use of body ochre and charcoal for adornment and protection against the weather (with the addition of grease), cicatrice body patterns, dances, songs, sacred trees, myths,

astronomy, different 'deities', charms and amulets, food prohibitions and butchering methods. Some other cultural developments encompassed neighbouring tribes but not the Island as a whole. These included watercraft, hut types, types of camps, paths, burial customs, mourning customs, style of salutation, rock art, art within huts, hunting methods, cooking methods.² The tendency to generalise customs and culture has been the source of some confusion in the past and is unfortunately becoming more widespread in recent times, perhaps through current attempts to create the notion of a historical homogenous Aboriginal nation.³ The idea of a Tasmanian Aborigine, is of course a European construct, blind to the rich cultural diversity to be found in the patchwork of mini-states that made up pre-contact society. The difficulty may be overcome in part by utilising as far as possible historical and archaeological sources relating to the specific area and tribe under study. The necessity of studying each tribe or region on an individual basis becomes evident when they are considered in the context of European contact both prior to and during the stages of dispossession.

Prior to their exposure to the full force of the policies of the Van Diemen's Land Company, the North West Tribe's early European contacts were essentially limited to adventurous explorers, surveyors and marauding sealers. This was a very different experience to that undergone by the more southerly tribes which had considerable contact with bushrangers, convicts, free settlers and officials of colonial administration. Unfortunately, owing to the rapid and total destruction of the North West Tribes, primary sources relating to their culture and habits during the Colonisation period are limited. However, a credible picture may still be

² Robson, Lloyd. *A History of Tasmania. Volume One*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press. 1992. p.18

³ see Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, pp. xxx - xxi for a brief outline of this trend.

constructed by supplementing traditional sources which rely almost entirely on the recorded observations (and biases) of the Colonisers with more recent archaeological findings.

It is now widely accepted that the first human inhabitants to arrive in Tasmania, migrated by way of the Bassian landbridge which was open between 36,000 to 29,000 years ago and again from about 20,000 years to its submersion around 8,000 years ago.⁴ When Archaeologists investigated the Fraser Cave (now Kutikina) in 1981 they found traces of human presence dating back as far as 20,000 years.⁵ The discovery generated a great deal of world wide publicity being made during a major controversy involving State Government plans to flood the area (including the Cave) by constructing the Gordon-below-Franklin Dam. As a consequence the preservation of the oldest known record of Aboriginal habitation on the Tasmanian mainland became an important element in the successful campaign to protect the Franklin river. Archaeological evidence unearthed by this discovery revealed that the hunters who sheltered and made use of the Kutikina cave were also the leading pioneers of human habitation at the extreme reaches of the Southern Hemisphere. Evidence suggests that bands of between 20 to 30 people used the cave as a base camp bringing their game back to the cave to be cooked and eaten. The cave floor is rich in wallaby bones, charcoal from cooking fires and both bone and stone implements. An excavation of one cubic meter at the mouth of the cave yielded some 40,000 stone artifacts and almost a quarter of a million fragments of animal bones alone.⁶ Some of the tools were designed for wood working and skinning wallaby

⁴ Collins, Ken. *South-West Tasmania*. Hobart, Heritage Books. 1990. p.109

⁵ Kiernan, Kevin. Jones, Rhys & Ranson, Don. 'New evidence from Fraser Cave for glacial age man in southwest Tasmania' in Tim Murray (ed.) *Archaeology of Aboriginal Australia*. St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin. 1998. p.68

⁶ Flood, Josephine, *The Riches of Ancient Australia*, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1999. p.329

carcasses;⁷ most were manufactured from a variety of stones including chert, crystal quartz, quartzite and the much prized Darwin Glass. The presence of Darwin Glass clearly indicates that an early form of mining activity was taking place. This valuable resource was originally quarried in the Darwin Crater situated some distance away near Macquarie Harbour. The black opaque material was produced by a meteor strike fusing rocks into a natural glass.⁸ Rock crystal was extracted from the cliffs at Table Cape in the North West to be used as cutting tools.⁹ Bone tools were also found and they may have been used for piercing and sewing skins.

It was to be another 10,000 years before other lands in equivalent southerly latitudes such as Fuego-Patagonia¹⁰ were occupied by southbound migrants.¹¹ The area of Tasmania occupied by the North West Tribe also provides ample proofs of long standing Aboriginal presence ranging from 6 - 8000 years ago at Rocky Cape to 22,500 years at Cave Bay Cave on Hunter Island.¹²

The total Aboriginal population of the Island at the time of British settlement remains the subject of much debate¹³ but was probably in the order of 4,000 to 5,000 made up of nine major tribal groupings (see Appendix 2). This estimate is based on previous studies made into the social organisation of Tasmanian tribes. George Augustus Robinson, the Government appointed Aboriginal Conciliator, made frequent reference

⁷ Collins, Ken. *op.cit.*, p.110

⁸ Flood, Josephine. *op.cit.*, p.322

⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*. Kingsgrove, Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Holstead Press Pty Ltd, 1966. p. 190

¹⁰ Kiernan, Kevin. Jones, Rhys & Ranson, Don., *op cit.*, p.70

¹¹ If length of residency were to be a eligibility factor in the establishment of land rights the Aboriginal inhabitants were on firm ground indeed. A case made stronger by research in the late 1980s that found evidence placing human habitation in caves along the Florentine River in south central Tasmania as early as 30,000 years ago.

¹² Kiernan, Kevin. Jones, Rhys & Ranson, Don., *op cit.*, pp. 68 -70

¹³ Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.17

in his journals to specific tribes which he identified either by name or by location. For example, during his first expedition into the North West in July 1830 Robinson's journal identified the Parperloihener by location (Robbins Island natives) and the Low Rocky Point Band from the South West Tribe by name Low.reen.ner (Lowreenne).¹⁴ From an examination of Robinson's journals, Plomley was able to identify some forty six of these 'tribes' and suggested that only half of the existing tribes had been recorded.¹⁵ Rhys Jones,¹⁶ erring on the side of caution proposed allowing for an additional fifty per cent on to those tribes identified by Robinson to give a possible total of seventy tribes or bands.

The size of these tribes has been estimated from early eye witness reports, particularly those made before the full impact of the European invasion took its toll. When Robinson made first contact with the Port Davey people in 1830, he noted twenty adults in the tribe. If one accepts Jones's argument, that to be viable under hunter gatherer conditions there would have had to be at least as many children as adults, this tribe under normal conditions must have had at least forty members.¹⁷ In 1802 Peron reported a party of twenty women returning to their husbands after shell fishing suggesting a tribal size of between sixty to eighty people.¹⁸ Another early account of tribal numbers came from James Kelly who reported at least fifty natives on Hunters Island in January 1816 during his circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land.¹⁹ Captain Hardwicke, who surveyed the North West in 1823, substantiated Kelly's

¹⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, pp. 190 - 191

¹⁵ Jones, Rhys. 'The Demography of Hunters and Farmers in Tasmania' in D.J.Mulvaney and J.Golson (eds) *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia*, Canberra. ANU Press, 1971. p.274

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.274

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.277

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.277

¹⁹ Kelly, James in Calder, James (ed.) *The Circumnavigations of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 By James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs*, Hobart, Sullivan's Cove, 1984. p.19

reports by noting that the natives were numerous in that area.²⁰ As late as 1834 when Robinson was visiting Cape Grim, home of the Pennemukeer band, he remarked that just two years earlier on his previous visit there were some 100 natives living there.²¹ From sightings such as these, Jones was able to calculate a total native population of between 3,000 and 5,000 prior to European settlement. Each distinctive tribal region was essentially a loose knit social and political unit made up of tribes living in adjoining areas and sharing a common language, as well as cultural and economic migration patterns. The North West Tribal group was one of the larger tribal divisions in Tasmania with six to seven hundred members²² and a territory extending from Table Cape on the North West Coast to Macquarie Harbour on the West Coast. The region supported eight tribes, mostly made up of around eighty members (see Appendix 2). Being primarily a maritime people they mostly occupied the Coastal strip, which included offshore islands including Robbins Island and those in the Hunter Group. This gave the tribal members a territory consisting of 3,400 square kilometers and some 550 kilometers of coastline²³. Leadership of the tribes fell to a single Chief rather than a group of elders. The Chief, a prominent male of a mature age was chosen for his skills in hunting or fighting. Hereditary factors appeared to play no part in the selection process.²⁴ The tribes consisted of hearth groups, these groups based upon family relationships (husband, wife, children and close relatives) numbered from two up to eleven people.²⁵ The family groups typically shared the same hut in

²⁰ Hardwicke, Captain. *Remarks upon the North Coast of Van Diemen's Land, from Port Dalrymple to the North-west Extremity; and from thence Four Leagues to the Southward of West Point on the West Coast*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1823. p.2

²¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.844

²² Ryan, Lyndall, *op.cit.*, p.33

²³ *ibid.*, p.33

²⁴ Wymeruck a man from the Parperloihener tribe of Robbins Island was chosen as chieftain of his wife's tribe see Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep In Silence*. Hobart. Blubberhead Press. 1987. p.803

²⁵ Ryan, Lyndall. *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (2nd Ed). St.. Leonards, Allen & Unwin. 1996. pp. 12-13

the areas where they were built, and camped and cooked around their own fire in other areas or when moving. Jorgenson described such a hearth group in the process of a seasonal migration:

When bivouacking anywhere on good ground and after constructing their rude bark huts at some distance from each other, each little family, which seldom exceed four in number, would set about making a small fire in front of the hut..... It was always an easy matter at a very long distance to distinguish the fires of the Blacks from those of a white party - the smoke from the former would ascend in many separate small and faint columns, whereas that from the latter would rise in one steady and large column discernible afar off.²⁶

Collectively and singly, these families travelled during seasonal, cultural and foraging expeditions but were based in, and operated from a common territory for which they possessed a developed sense of ownership.²⁷

The terms 'tribes and bands' are not especially useful in the Tasmanian context as the real tribal units were in effect the bands. The so-called 'tribes' possessed no formal structure, authority or recognised leadership, consequently allegiances between the bands were tenuous with serious friction arising from time to time. Bands even from within the same tribal groupings could only enter another's boundaries under agreed conditions and any trespass or breach of these conditions could lead to war.²⁸ Robinson witnessed such a disagreement during his third visit to the North West in February 1834. On making contact with a party of the Tarkiners at Sandy Cape he was told that they had just been involved in a skirmish with a group of Tommeginers.

²⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. Hobart, Blubber Head Press. 1991. p.56

²⁷ West, John. *The History of Tasmania*. Melbourne, Angus & Robertson Publishers. 1981. p.321. I use the term ownership rather than the contemporary notion of custodianship as it best fits Aboriginal relationship to the land in Tasmania.

²⁸ Ryan, Lyndall, *op.cit.*, p.14

Apparently the Tommeginers had visited their area presumably to gather food; they had, according to custom brought with them the highly valued red ochre. After some time a request for some of the ochre was made to the Tommeginers which was refused. This refusal led to a battle that resulted in fatal casualties on both sides.²⁹

Ochre was valued primarily for its application as an adornment and means of exchange, but it may also have had some religious function. Needless to say, the occurrence of ochre deposits within a clan's boundaries bestowed significant economic and social advantages on the tribe. As an adornment it was used to colour hair and when mixed with charcoal and grease it was rubbed into wounds in the production of cicatrices³⁰ on both men and women. Alexander McKay had the opportunity to observe the elaborate daily ritual of preparing men's hair with ochre during his period in command of Swan Island:

As soon as the morning star appeared they would get up and commence there toilet which would take there wifes (sic) till after sunrise to dress a naked man, they had each woman 2 flat stones with plenty of mutton bird and penguin fat which they pounded with a kind of ochre and sometimes charcoal which they rubbed on the mens hair making it hang over their shoulders in ringlets, then each man had his body done according to fancy varying it each day.³¹

Most of the ochre used in the North West originated from other tribal territories such as Mt. Housetop and the Gog Range. However, the North West tribes had access to an underwater deposit of their own in the Welcome River which was mined by the

²⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, pp. 853-854

³⁰ Robson, Lloyd, *op.cit.*, p.23

³¹ McKay, Thelma. *Alexander McKay: This Prince of Bush Travellers*. Hobart. Copicentre. 1994. p.51

women.³² Robinson recorded the significance these sites held for Aboriginals: "The chief Mannalargenna is overjoyed at the prospect of seeing this celebrated place. He is in raptures ... He is passionately fond of colouring or bedaubing his body with a mixture of ochre and grease".³³ The mining operations were performed by women using a rock as a hammer and sharpened piece of wood as a chisel. Soft ore was preferred for ease of processing which was accomplished by grinding the ochre with flat pieces of granite, the ochre was then transported in soft kangaroo-skin bags made for the purpose.³⁴ The granite tools known as Ballywinne stones were shaped by women in the following manner:

Their method of working the stone to this shape appeared to me ingenious. The women I saw made a wet mark with their finger with spittle in the direction they wanted it broken, *i.e.* the edges taken off like a hexagon. They then put the edge of the stone in a small fire of charcoal, and when sufficiently warm tapped it with a small stone and it broke in the direction required.³⁵

Excavations undertaken during the 1980s at the Gog Range mine now called Toolumbunner (Possum Rocks) dated activity at this particular mine site back to the 15th century.³⁶ However, this is a relatively new site as the history of ochre mining is much older with ochre being found in all layers of the Kutikina Cave spanning the period of 20,000 to 14,000 years ago.³⁷ This ancient presence of ochre has produced speculation that the Tasmanian Aboriginals were practicing art at a very early stage, a theory that has gained additional credence with the discovery of hand stencils in Judds' Cavern in the Cracroft valley dated at 10,000 years old.

³² Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.866

³³ *ibid.*, p.895

³⁴ Robson, Lloyd, *op.cit.*, p.23

³⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.897

³⁶ Sagona, Antonio (ed.), *Bruising the Red Earth*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1994. p.153

³⁷ Flood, Josephine, *op.cit.*, p.322

The need for tribes to periodically replenish their stocks of ochre as well as access seasonal supplies of shellfish along the coast, led to the establishment of regular visiting patterns that conferred mutual economic benefits on each of the bands. Just as women were central to ochre mining operations, they also played the dominant role in gathering sea bird eggs, hunting seals and diving for shellfish. The women were expert divers and swimmers and La Billardi re commented that native women could stay submerged twice as long as his best divers.³⁸ The women would manufacture baskets woven from cutting-grass³⁹ or kelp (*Phycomyces potatorum*) for the purpose of gathering the rich supply of food found in coastal waters i.e. crayfish, mussels, abalone and oysters. There is some dispute on whether Aborigines ate scale fish or not, there is evidence from other parts of the Island of a refusal to do so. Captain Cook's report of a refusal by the natives to eat any fish offered cooked or raw,⁴⁰ is often quoted to support the case that Aborigines ate no fish.⁴¹ However, the argument based on Cook's experience is less convincing when one finds that Cook also reported ... "When some bread was offered them, as soon as they understood it was to be eaten, they either returned or threw it away, without tasting it". and they expressed their indifference to presents, fishhooks and iron and anything else that was offered to them.⁴² One should exercise caution in cases of single reports emanating from one region alone like the above, and not assume that the cultural traditions of one tribe necessarily extends to others. Taboos in particular varied from band to band, Backhouse observing this phenomenon whilst visiting Flinders Island in 1833:

³⁸ Robson, Lloyd, *op.cit.*, p.214

³⁹ Calder, J.E. *The Native Tribes of Tasmania* (1875). Hobart, Cox Kay Pty Ltd. (Facsimile Edition) 1972. p.36

⁴⁰ It should be noted that the natives in question also rejected offers of bread, iron, fishhooks and anything else that Cook tried to tempt them with. See Bonwick, James. *The Lost Tasmanian Race*. London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington. 1884. pp. 4 -5

⁴¹ Walker, James Backhouse. *Early Tasmania* (Fifth Impression) Hobart, M.C.Reed, Government Printer. 1989. p.284

⁴² Bonwick, James. *op.cit.*, pp 4 - 5

The wallaby abounds here. Several were killed by the natives who accompanies us. Some of these people only eat the male animals, others only the females. We were unable to learn the reason of this, but they so stoutly adhere to the practise, that it is said, hunger will not drive them to deviate from it.⁴³

There is also evidence that whilst on Flinders Island some Aborigines at least, ate fish and were particularly fond of parrot fish (*Pseudolabrus fucicola*).⁴⁴ West⁴⁵ reports



'Natives fishing. Flinders Island Feby. 45' by Simpson
De Wesselow (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart)

Aborigines warning Europeans correctly that the Toad Fish was poisonous, a knowledge that assumes some experience of the eating of scale fish. Plomley, when discussing the matter, made reference to Hamelin who gave some natives a skate which he reported seemed to please them, the following day he found the skate on the beach with its liver removed. Hamelin pointed out that it was a common practice for Aborigines in Western Australia to spear skate for their livers. Plomley then

⁴³ Backhouse, James. *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*. London, Hamilton, Adams, and Co. 1843. p.171

⁴⁴ Roth, Ling. H. *The Aborigines of Tasmania*. Halifax. 1899. Facsimile Edition. Hobart, Fullers Bookshop. 1968. p.104

⁴⁵ West, John *op.cit.*, cited in Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.88

suggested that there may be a connection between this practice and that reported in Tasmania by Baudin in 1802: "The night of the 3rd to the 4th were calm and fair. One of our boats, which had gone fishing, saw several natives a little way off on the shore. They also were fishing with torches."⁴⁶ Although early explorers used the term fishing to include diving for shellfish and crayfish, there is little doubt that these Aborigines abroad at night with torches, were fishing for scale fish and not involved in any underwater activity. Fishing with the use of torch light and spears is still a common method of catching fish such as flounder in Tasmania today. There is also a mythological record of this type of shallow water fishing. Aborigines had an intimate knowledge of the stars and identified formations by names associated with familiar objects on earth as is done in the western tradition. Robinson wrote "They are quite at home on the subject, that is, they have names for the stars and constellations and are aware that they revolve... They call the black spot in the Milky Way or Orion's belt a stingaree and say the blackfellows are spearing it".⁴⁷

The whole question is complicated further by the existence of a considerable number of fish traps particularly in the North of the State. All but one of the fish traps identified by Stockton are found on the North West Coast. Stockton attributed this phenomena to the mean tidal range that exceeds two metres along that stretch of coastline, ideal for this type of construction.⁴⁸ Some of these traps were certainly constructed by Europeans - Mr. G. Paine⁴⁹ built several fish traps in the Burnie area in the 1950s, however, there is good reason to believe others were of Aboriginal origin.

⁴⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines 1802*. Hobart, Blubber Head Press. 1983. pp. 51 - 52.

⁴⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.861

⁴⁸ Stockton, Jim. *Stone Wall Fish-Traps in Tasmania*. in *Australian Archaeology*. No. 14, June 1982. p.112

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.109

Stockton was unable to establish European origins for three traps on the North West Coast at Rocky Cape, Sisters Beach and Boat Harbour, all located within the territory occupied by the Tommeginers. During the course of my research I interviewed an elderly retired farmer Mr. A. Percy, who identified two midden sites that he had witnessed as a child, being turned over by his father with a horse and plough (see Appendix 3). Immediately opposite these sites one can clearly see another significant fish trap not as yet documented in literature. This fish trap is situated adjacent to Table Cape near Freestone Cove which is also within the Tommeginer's tribal boundaries (see photo below).



Photograph by Author. 1999

The Rocky Cape fish trap was first examined by archaeologist Rhys Jones in 1963 he initially thought it to be of Aboriginal construction as the builders were unknown to the local community. However, he changed his mind when excavations in the local

middens revealed no fish bones earlier than 3,000 years ago⁵⁰ and the condition of the trap suggested later construction. The latter point becomes of less significance with the revelation that the resident population admitted rebuilding the walls, therefore an alternative solution to Jones's problem may be sought. Consumers may have developed the habit of disposing of their fish bones directly into the campfire thereby destroying evidence of their meal. The fish remains could have been taken by sea birds or the Tasmanian Devils that are known to have scavenged unattended middens.⁵¹ It may simply be that the tribe that originally occupied Rocky Cape moved elsewhere 3,000 years ago allowing the trap to initially deteriorate. As Rocky Cape was certainly a transit stop⁵² during spring migrations, the Aborigines, having no portable method of catching fish i.e. hooks or nets would have dined on more accessible food such as Seals, Abalone and Crayfish during their temporary stay. The case for the Sisters Beach trap being of Aboriginal design is stronger, with descendants of the first Europeans to settle the area adamant the trap was there on their arrival.⁵³ The Table Cape trap is also a good candidate for Aboriginal origins. There are no local records or knowledge of its construction and it is a very large structure situated immediately adjacent Aboriginal midden sites and walking track (see Appendix 4). The site is also a considerable distance from the nearest early settlement at Alexandria and across the Inglis River from the town of Wynyard. It is an important feature of fish traps that they be located close to the habitation of those who utilise them, as close monitoring is necessary when the tide runs out as any fish caught in the shallows become vulnerable to scavenging seabirds.⁵⁴ The head of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife's Aboriginal Heritage Unit, Caleb Pedder agreed that it

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.109

⁵¹ Flood, Josephine. *op.cit.*, p.46

⁵² Stockton, Jim. *Cumulative Report: Sites of Significance Survey, Tasmania*. 1976.

⁵³ Irby, Ken in *The Sunday Tasmanian*, Launceston, 1998 May 24, p.10

⁵⁴ Stockton, Jim. *Stone Wall Fish-Traps in Tasmania*. *op.cit.*, p.109

is difficult to disprove Aboriginal origins for many of these traps therefore they are listed in the Unit's database and are currently protected under the Aboriginal Relics Act and the State Coastal Policy.⁵⁵ If, as it appears likely these traps were constructed by Aborigines then they represent a significant investment in time and labour. The degree of effort involved in assembling these traps would suggest that there was a reasonable expectancy of regular, permanent untroubled access to the resource, a continuous commitment that suggests the existence of some notion of ownership.

Hunting for game animals was principally a male activity with the spear and the waddie the main weapons. Although the use of the throwing stick was unknown in Tasmania, the Aborigines were expert hunters nonetheless and their skills with the spear is well documented. Robinson had occasion to compare their relative skill-at-arms with some mainland Aborigines:

...I got the two native lads of VDL and the Sydney natives to exercise themselves in throwing the spear, and found they could not throw the spear as my natives did, and could not throw it with any precision. Their manner also of shifting from those weapons was quite different: they held in their hands two sticks with which they occasionally struck away the spears...They are small effeminate creatures and know nothing of the language of these people. The natives of this country would soon destroy them. They cannot throw their spear except with a womera.⁵⁶

James Calder⁵⁷ noted that spears could be thrown with precision up to 70 yards (64 meters) whilst in 1793, Labillardière⁵⁸ the French expeditioner witnessed accuracy up

⁵⁵ Pedder, Caleb. in *The Sunday Tasmanian*, Launceston, 1998 May 24, p.10

⁵⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, op.cit., p.428

⁵⁷ Calder, J.E. *The Native Tribes of Tasmania*, Hobart, Cox Kay Pty. Ltd. 1972. p. 33

⁵⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines 1802*, Blubber Head Press. Hobart. 1983. pp.186-187

to 100 yards (91 meters). Jorgenson described an official demonstration that took place before Governor Arthur:

A large door was provided for the Blacks to make their spear exercise at. At the distance of about sixty or seventy yards they sent their spears through the door, and all the spears nearly in the same place. Oridia placed a crawfish on the top of a spear, then retreated sixty yards, and at that distance lodged two spears out of three in the crawfish.⁵⁹

Made from Tea tree or Dogwood (*Pomaderris apetala*) the spears were at least ten feet (3m) in length. Robinson described their manufacture: "In making their spears, the natives begin by making the point. They then take off the bark, after which they hold it over the fire and then straighten it by placing it between their teeth and bending it. After that they black it over".⁶⁰ The other principal weapon, the waddie, was described as a wooden club about 30 inches long (76 cm) with the stem of the waddie balanced against the head.⁶¹ It was thrown with a rotary motion and was an accurate effective hunting weapon even against flying birds. Various methods of trapping were also used, the simplest consisting of sharpened stakes projecting 2 feet (61cm) out of the ground, the part in the ground being burnt to prevent decaying.⁶² Apart from being used to wound kangaroos, this form of trap also had a military function against bare footed enemies.⁶³ Another trap entailed the construction of small grass huts in which natives concealed themselves: "In front on a rock they place some fish, fastened by a stone, and when the crows come to feed they do nothing more than put out hand and pull them in. They adopt the same plan for catching ducks except that

⁵⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1991. p.114

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.220

⁶¹ Fletcher, Jane Ada. *The Stone Age Man of Tasmania*. Hobart. Paper held in the Local History Collection, Hellyer Library Burnie. 1951. p.17

⁶² Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.875

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.875

they bait with worms".⁶⁴ While travelling on the West Coast, Robinson came upon a more sophisticated snare that he described as a small dome-shaped basket construction with a small hole in the top,⁶⁵ appropriately baited it was used to catch ducks and the crows that followed hunting parties in quest of carrion.

The North West countryside is rich with a wide variety of game, a resource husbanded and encouraged by the regular firing of bushland. These fires served a number of purposes, by encouraging new shoots they created pasture land for kangaroos and stimulated growth of bracken⁶⁶ and other plant food sources. They were also used to herd animals whilst hunting, as well as clear pathways through the bush.⁶⁷ The topography of the North West was dramatically transformed by this form of farming as Hellyer discovered in his expedition to Valentines Peak (*Natone*) in 1827 (see Appendix.5 for part of his chart). Travelling inland from the west coast he reported on the natural density of the bush and difficulty in movement

...the air in these dense forests is putrid and oppressive, and swarms with mosquitoes and large stinging flies the size of English bees. Daylight is completely shut out by masses of foliage impervious to the rays of the sun ...We were not able to force our way on five hundred yards in an hour in some of these horrid scrubs.⁶⁸

On descending from Valentine's Peak to the South, Hellyer found an entirely different kind of landscape: "...We alighted in the evening upon an open spot which had caught my observation from the top. I found it consisted of grassy hills and knolls, and resembled a neglected old park - a thousand or fifteen hundred acres in a

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 751-752

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 722

⁶⁶ Flood, J. *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, Sydney. William Collins Pty. Ltd. 1983. p.213

⁶⁷ Volger, Gisela. *Making Fire By Percussion In Tasmania*. Paper held in Local History Collection, Hellyer Library Burnie. p.58

⁶⁸ Hellyer, Henry. *Report of Henry Hellyer dated Circular Head, 13 March, 1827*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1823. p.2

patch without a tree... Grass run to seed, the tops of which appeared at this season nearly white...Here we saw kangaroos in abundance, and tracks of them in all directions."⁶⁹ A day later, Hellyer commented: "...went over many considerable hills burnt by the natives, found a lot of native huts". These expansive hunting grounds were subsequently recommended to the Van Diemens Land Company as appropriate land to establish their sheep enterprises and were later named the Hampshire and Surrey Hills. Betty Hiatt commented on the extensive nature and long term results of 'firestick farming' in the North West region:

...the inhabitants of the west coast extended their narrow coastal environment by burning rain forest areas which in some places came down to the sea. The resultant sedgeland provided much more food than the rain forest. Similar burning occurred in other parts of Tasmania and in most cases it changed existing vegetation into one which provided more or different food sources.⁷⁰

Robinson observed evidence of Aboriginal burning along the coastline at Rocky Cape in 1830.⁷¹ Apart from the kangaroo and wallaby that abounded on these man-made pastures, other game regularly taken by Aborigines included bandicoot, betong, blue tongue lizards, echidna, emu, potoroo, wombat and possums. The latter were hunted by women who displayed considerable ingenuity and athleticism in the process. Jorgensen described the method:

It is truly surprising to observe the agility with which the Blacks could ascend the highest trees, sometimes ninety feet in height, and no branches on any part of the trunk. The women were made to perform this hazardous work, for the purpose of catching opossums. A grass rope was made which fastened round the trees, so as to slide up. A cut was then made with a rude tomahawk about 3 or 4 feet high from the

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.3

⁷⁰ Hiatt, Betty. *Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines*. in *Oceania*. Vol.38. No.3. March, 1968. p.219

⁷¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.188

ground, on which to rest one foot. The rope was then sledded higher up, and a second notch made, and so on until the summit was obtained. The woman would then put her hand in the hole where the opossum kept itself, and dragged it out. Should however the animal in despair leap down on the ground it was immediately caught by the Blacks underneath who formed a circle round the tree.⁷²

The division of labour so sharply defined in the activities of hunting and the gathering of seafood played a lesser role in the harvesting of vegetable foods with many recorded observations of males sharing in the labour.⁷³ Little is known about the plant foods consumed but they included Native Currant (*Coprosma quadrifida*), the roots of the Native Carrot (*Geranium parviflorum*) (roasted before eating) and Native Bread (*Mylitta Australis*) a species of tuber that could attain "the size of a child's head."⁷⁴ Labillardière reported "on 9 February 1793, a party of natives seated by their fires were making a meal of mussels, and eating with them pieces of the seaweed (*Fucus palmatus*), which had been softened by cooking; later the same day, these same natives were seen to gather the fruits of *Mesembryanthemum edule* [now *Carpobrotus rossii*. pigface] and to eat them with relish."⁷⁵ Robinson observed natives eating grass trees (*Xanthorhoea australis*) at Rocky Cape, reporting that after the outer leaves had been stripped off he found "it very nutritious, in taste like a roasted chestnut."⁷⁶ Robinson also noted whilst travelling in the vicinity of Emu Bay that in January natives gathered, roasted and ate seed taken from the pods of lightwood (blackwood) (*Acacia melanoxylon*).⁷⁷ Bracken root (*Pteridium esculentum*) was eaten by Aborigines after baking in ashes as an accompaniment with

⁷² Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. op.cit.*, p.57

⁷³ Hiatt, Betty. *Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines. in Oceania. Vol.38. No.3. March, 1968. p.209*

⁷⁴ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.97

⁷⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines 1802, op.cit.*, p.204

⁷⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.188

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.480

roasted kangaroo.⁷⁸ Jorgenson described Aborigines placing harvested kangaroo apple (*Solanum laciniatum*) in sand banks to ripen.⁷⁹ James Backhouse, who took a keen interest in the subject commented on his experiments with Aboriginal food:

On a Myrtle, we met with a large fungus, such as is eaten by the Natives in cases of extremity. It is known in the colony by the name of Punk, and is white and spongy; when dried it is commonly used instead of tinder. Another edible fungus grows upon the Myrtle, in these forests it is produced in clusters, from swollen portions of the branches, and varies from the size of a marble to that of a walnut. When young, its colour is pale, and it is covered with a thin skin that is easily taken off. Its taste, in this state is like cold cow-heel. When matured, the skin splits, and exhibits a network of a yellowish colour. It may be considered the best native esculent in V.D. Land... I dug up a *Gastrodium sesamoides*, a plant of the orchis tribe, which is brown, leafless, and 1 1/2 feet high, with dingy, whitish, tubular flowers. It grows among decaying vegetable matter, and has a root like a series of kidney potatoes, terminating in a branched, thick mass of coral like fibres. It is eaten by the Aborigines, and sometimes called native Potato; but the tubers are watery and insipid.⁸⁰

The only known drink that Aborigines consumed was water with the exception of the sap from the Cider trees (*Eucalyptus gunii*), which were tapped and the resultant sap allowed to collect in hole dug at the base of the tree. These holes were then covered with stone to keep birds and animals out while it was allowed to ferment.⁸¹ Robinson reported that up to a quart of liquid that tasted like cider was obtained from one tree and that the drinking of it frequently made the natives drunk.⁸²

As Aborigines had no means of boiling water, cooking was restricted to various forms of roasting. Shellfish were simply cooked in their shells whilst muttonbirds (*Nectris*

⁷⁸ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.96

⁷⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. op.cit.*, p.56

⁸⁰ Backhouse, James. *op.cit.*, p.119

⁸¹ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.94

⁸² Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, Launceston, Foot & Playsted Pty Ltd. 1993. p.39.

brevicaudus) were roasted on spits after having their feathers singed off in the flames.⁸³ James Walker described the method of cooking larger animals:

The Kangaroo Rat was cooked during the halt.....The animal was thrown into the ashes till the hair was well singed off, and it became a little distended by the heat; it was then scraped, and cleaned of entrails, after which it was returned to the fire until roasted enough. This is a common mode of cooking practiced by the Aborigines, who find that, by thus roasting the meat in the skin, the gravy is more abundant.⁸⁴

Fire was an important tool of the Aborigines and apart from its use in cooking and hunting was used extensively for warmth, ceremonies, cremating the dead, communication, pest control and to bend wood for building the bee-hive huts found in the North West region.⁸⁵ Considering the wide and varied use of fire and its obvious importance in terms of survival it is strange that the notion that Aborigines were unable to make fire remains so firmly entrenched. Part of the reason may be found in the ethnocentric attitudes of early investigators ever keen to demonstrate the very 'primitiveness' of this newly discovered 'stone age people'. Jane Fletcher in an article entitled: *The Stone Age Man of Tasmania* published in the journal *Tasmanian Education* in 1951, wrote "...The aborigines were a race of food-gatherers, nothing more. Thus they remained. The passing centuries found them just the same with their brain power apparently stationary..."⁸⁶ The Aboriginal practice of carrying firesticks as they travelled is sometimes considered sufficient proof of an inability to make fire. Lyndall Ryan for example, dealt with the question briefly by noting: "...In their daily lives, the men carried fire (they were unable to make fire)..."⁸⁷ However, there

⁸³ Walker, James Backhouse. *op.cit.*, p.257

⁸⁴ Backhouse, James. *op.cit.*, p.85

⁸⁵ Breen, Shayne. *Tasmanian Aborigines - Making Fire*. Sandy Bay, Tasmania Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings. 1991. Vol.39. no.1. p.43

⁸⁶ Fletcher, Jane Ada. *op.cit.*, p.5

⁸⁷ Ryan, Lyndall *op.cit.*, p.11

were many other possible reasons for this practice. It would have been convenient in a wet climate, or it may have been for ritual purposes as it was reported that only men carried the fire. Plomley provides another reason asserting that "the men carried a firestick when they moved about, so as to set alight the vegetation in order to burn it off."⁸⁸ Jorgenson was clear on the subject:

I have alluded to the fire-sticks and burning grass which the natives carried with them to light their fires in different places at which they might stop. I am aware that they were acquainted with the mode of procuring fire by friction, as is the case in all other countries occupied by savage tribes, but the proper material is not to be obtained in all places.⁸⁹

If, as Ryan suggests, only the men carried firesticks,⁹⁰ then Robinson's experience of following the tracks of a single woman (Pordeboik) near the Arthur River and discovering the remains of a fire she had lit (by herself) to cook a crayfish⁹¹ would indicate the existence of alternative ways of obtaining fire. Robinson reported that he was told by some Aborigines that when their fire went out they had to eat raw meat until replenishing their source of fire from another mob.⁹² However, Robinson merely recounted the incident in his journal making no comment on his opinion regarding the veracity of the information, he may even have misunderstood them. This instance has formed the basis for many claims supporting the 'inability to make fire' position. Plomley was less certain, and after reviewing the available evidence concluded; "that they produced fire only when they had to, that an important method of doing so was by percussion, and that friction between two pieces of wood was probably employed

⁸⁸ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines. op.cit.*, p.41

⁸⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. op.cit.*, p.56

⁹⁰ Ryan, Lyndall *op.cit.*, p.11

⁹¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.859

⁹² *ibid.*, p.567

also.”⁹³ Bonwick was quite emphatic that it was this latter method that was used “The friction of two pieces of wood produced fire, whose embers roasted the food”.⁹⁴ John West was also of the opinion that the friction method was employed.⁹⁵ Roth⁹⁶ in his discussion of the subject included two photographs (Appendix 6) of Tasmanian fire drills as examples, one being donated to Sir John Lubbock by Robinson. However, there is some doubt surrounding the authenticity of these drills. An entry from Robinson’s Victorian diary in 1840 recorded: “I observed for the first time how natives in their original state get fire by friction from two pieces of wood.”⁹⁷ He then went on to describe and draw a fire drill identical to the one in the photograph stating that such fire drills were given to him in Australia.

There is however, a substantial body of evidence supporting another method of producing fire which is often overlooked - the percussion method. Furneaux⁹⁸ wrote in 1773 “In one of their huts we found stones they strike fire with and some tinder made of the bark of a tree”. Bligh⁹⁹ also found small baskets containing flints and soft bark carefully wrapped in grass at Adventure Bay from which he concluded “with this stone and bark the natives probably strike their fire”. In the same year 1792 at Recherche Bay, Labillardière¹⁰⁰ found small rush baskets at a campsite some containing pieces of silex wrapped in softer bark, which he also concluded were used for making fire. Robinson, whilst preparing for his first expedition, recorded obtaining a stone from Aborigines with which they “sharpen their waddies and by

⁹³ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines. op.cit.*, p.41

⁹⁴ Bonwick, James. *op.cit.*, p.1

⁹⁵ West, John. *op.cit.*, p.323

⁹⁶ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.83

⁹⁷ Volger, Gisela *op.cit.*, p. 59

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 60

⁹⁹ Volger, Gisela *op.cit.*, p. 60

¹⁰⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines 1802, op.cit.*, p.191

means of which they strike fire. It has the resemblance of flint and is found at the Isthmus of Brune."¹⁰¹ Aboriginal knowledge and possession of a stone capable of making fire is indicated in a description of a raid on an Aboriginal camp in 1830, when it was reported that: "...four stand of arms..." had been captured "...loaded and in perfect order. Two had 'native' flints in them...".¹⁰² One objection to the percussion method has been to suggest that 'real flint' does not exist in Tasmania,¹⁰³ however one has only to strike together two pieces of white quartz which is plentiful along the North West coast to obtain a fine spark. Josephine Flood of the Australian Heritage Commission provides additional evidence derived from archaeological digs on Maatsuyker Island:

There are also substantial quantities of charcoal in middens on this and other islands. This implies that prehistoric Tasmanians could make fire, for it would have been difficult if not impossible to keep a fire burning in the watercraft all the way across to the more distant islands.¹⁰⁴

Taking into account the discovery of fire hearths on many other offshore islands the balance of evidence would suggest the necessity for caution before adopting a fixed position on the matter.

Shelter for the North West Tribe consisted of permanent bee-hive huts at least 10 to 12 feet (3 - 3.5 m) in diameter and 6 feet (1.8 m) in height.¹⁰⁵ Jorgensen with his usual regard for detail described a typical hut sighted near Temma on the West Coast:

¹⁰¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.113

¹⁰² Reynolds, Henry. *Fate of a Free People*. Ringwood, Penguin Books Australia Ltd. 1995. p.41

¹⁰³ Volger, Gisela *op.cit.*, p. 61

¹⁰⁴ Flood, Josephine. *The Riches of Ancient Australia*. *op.cit.*, p.325

¹⁰⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.171 also p.859

On the 31st March in the vicinity of Temma we observed a compact native hut far different (as are all huts in this quarter) from those seen to the eastward. It was a complete piece of Gothic Architecture, in the shape of a dome, and presenting all the first rudiments of that science. It was made to contain 12 to 14 people with ease. The entrance was small and not above 2 feet high. The wood used for the principal supports had been steamed and bent by fire. The huts as well as baskets and other things produced by the western natives evince great ingenuity, and the nature of the country compels them to build compact dwellings to shelter them against the bleak winds blowing over a large tract of open country, not well supplied with fuel, and of a piercing chilliness.¹⁰⁶

The huts were usually found in groups or villages, situated in both winter and summer hunting grounds, the bands moving between them. Flood describes the site of one such village at West Point:

This is one of the largest, richest and best preserved Aboriginal occupation sites excavated in Australia. It spans the period from about 1,900 to 1,300 years ago... It is a village midden, with seven or eight roughly circular depressions on its surface. These measure about four metres across and half a metre deep, and were the foundations of dome-shaped huts.¹⁰⁷

Wells are also found in close proximity to these sites particularly on the West coast owing to the scarceness of fresh water. Robinson happened upon one of these wells between Richardson Point and Couta Rocks: "Saw a native well, a small spring not more than two feet in diameter. It was delightfully situated in a valley and had steps down to it and muttonfish shells to drink out of".¹⁰⁸ Aboriginal women would also gather sponges from the beach which they used to give infants liquids by squeezing fresh water in their mouths.¹⁰⁹ Jorgensen also measured a larger hut at 15 to 16 feet long (4.5 - 4.8m) and 12 feet (3.6m) in breadth noting charcoal from fire used for

¹⁰⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. op.cit.*, p.10

¹⁰⁷ Flood, Josephine. *op.cit.*, p.339

¹⁰⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.170

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.868

heating and cooking in the center of the floor. The huts in the North West were much more substantial than those found on the East Coast, a difference that may be explained by the West coast climate, which is colder and wetter.¹¹⁰ Hiatt reasons that the need to build stronger weatherproof hence more permanent structures made it more economical to build larger dwellings, and if the food supply were good would encourage a more sedentary lifestyle.¹¹¹ Jorgensen also reported that paintings "...representing birds, beasts, human forms etc., for the most part tolerably well executed.." were generally found in 'stationary huts'.¹¹² Hellyer came across some of that art in a hut close to Guildford which he took as a souvenir to be sent back to England. He described it as a charcoal drawing of the moon.¹¹³ Robinson made note of these paintings and assumed that circles of varying diameters were executed by use of stolen scissors, on enquiry he found that "...those circles were made by means of a forked stick (Y shaped) the manner as we use a compass..."¹¹⁴ Aboriginal Art was not confined to huts, it was also carved in trees¹¹⁵ and in the North West tribal region only, more permanently into rock. There are some engravings to be found at Mersey Bluff near Devonport, an area within the boundaries of the Northern tribal groups. However recent scientific examinations conclude them to be "...natural stress lines in the dolerite emphasised by root action and the effects of plant acids in the grooves".¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Hiatt, Betty. *Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines*. in *Oceania*. Vol.38. No.3. *op.cit.*, p.201

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.202

¹¹² Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. *op.cit.*, p.58

¹¹³ Hellyer, Henry. *op.cit.*, p.4

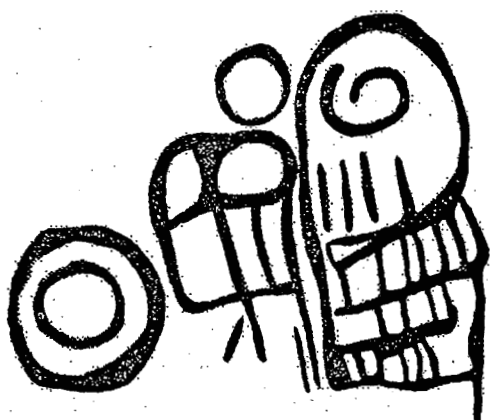
¹¹⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, pp.542 - 543

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.884

¹¹⁶ Flood, Josephine. *The Riches of Ancient Australia*. *op.cit.*, p.334

There are more than a dozen petroglyph sites in the North West region, those at Mount Cameron West being the best known. Flood described the Mount Cameron

site as "...the greatest surviving example of prehistoric art found in Tasmania and is widely regarded as one of the most outstanding aesthetic achievements of any hunter gatherer society..." (see diagram).¹¹⁸



**Petroglyph at Mt.Cameron West
on the land of the Peerappers.¹¹⁷**

The circular drawings commented on by both Robinson and Hellyer were a

common motif that often appeared in some cicatrix incised on the body. Aboriginal females had these motifs representing the sun and moon displayed on "...each side of the backbone and about the hips..." the circles being about four centimeters in diameter.¹¹⁹ These symbols were more than just decoration as Robinson noted: "...the cicatrice of the sun and moon is intended to remove inflammation and having the power of those luminaries they imagine it will have the same influence of the part affected..."¹²⁰ In addition to the accessing of astrological influences it was also believed that amulets containing the ashes or bone relics of the dead were capable of effecting healing in certain cases.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Stockton, Jim. *Cumulative Report: Sites of Significance Survey, Tasmania*. op.cit., p.100

¹¹⁸ Flood, Josephine. op.cit., p.338

¹¹⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, op.cit., pp.581 - 582

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, pp.581 - 582

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.658

Unfortunately the wealth of knowledge concerning the healing properties of native plants that must have been acquired by Aborigines over the centuries has now been largely lost, along with many other elements of traditional lifestyle. We do know that the leaves of the Stinkwood (*Ziera arborescens*) were worn round the head to relieve pain and that Mutton bird oil was used in cases of rheumatism.¹²² It is also reported that Wattle tree blossom suspended in huts was considered an opiate and an aid to sleep.¹²³ Jorgensen recorded two incidents in which Aborigines, after sustaining serious injuries (one had a hand torn off) made a speedy and remarkable recovery, concluding that: "From the facility with which the Aborigines cured wounds not mortal, it may reasonably be supposed that they were acquainted with the virtues of certain herbs".¹²⁴

There is little accurate information concerning Aboriginal spiritual beliefs in Tasmania as much of the relevant early contact data is sourced from catechists more intent on supplanting indigenous religion than recording it.¹²⁵ Contemporary observers like Henry Melville, simply assumed that they possessed no religion at all, asserting that "...they do not appear to have any rites or ceremonies, religious or otherwise..."¹²⁶

Due to the paucity of detailed information currently available, there are a number of difficulties associated with the task of comparing the religious beliefs of Tasmania Aborigines with those of the mainland. However, some comparisons are necessary

¹²² Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.66

¹²³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.213 and p.302

¹²⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. op.cit.*, p.93

¹²⁵ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines. op.cit.*, p.62

¹²⁶ Melville, Henry. *The History of Van Diemen's Land* (1836). Sydney. Horwitz Publications Pty. Ltd. 1965. p.59 These attitudes were not restricted to Van Diemens Land, Le Soeff writing on New Holland Aborigines in 1878 commented: "I never could discover among them anything amounting to religion...My opinion is that they have no religious notions or ideas whatever". see Stanner. W.E.H. 'Religion, totemism and symbolism' in Charlesworth, Max. (ed.) *Religion in Aboriginal Australia*. St Lucia. University of Queensland Press. 1989. p.139

in order to explore and distinguish the differing relationships to the land. Although Aboriginal religious beliefs and practices vary across the continent, Diane Bell noted that : "...at core is the concept of the dreamtime a moral code that informs and unites all life".¹²⁷ In the Aboriginal Dreaming, the Aborigines see a Creator producing an Ancestral Being that gives birth to Spirits and Ancestors. These Ancestral Beings are often portrayed as having human, animal and spirit natures, or sometimes just animal and spirit such as the Rainbow Serpent. Ancestral Beings play a more important role in the Dreaming than ancestors as they permeate and invest the land with power, and the signs of that power with beneficent intent. Stanner observed that the Aborigines transformed these signs of intent into: "... *assurances* of life under mystical nurture. Their symbolic observances toward the signs, in rites of several kinds, were in essence acts of faith toward the ground of that assurance".¹²⁸ The embodiment of the spiritual power of the dreaming into particular sites creates 'sacred ground', that is, it places these areas apart from the profane world and are "...potentially dangerous to those who have no rights to them".¹²⁹ Deborah Bird Rose wrote both of the obligations and the affinity that linked mainland Aborigines to these sites, explaining that "...each group should at least...perform increase ceremonies at local Dreaming sites, and protect dangerous Dreaming sites so that no harm comes from them. In return, country takes care of its people, providing them with food, water and all the other necessities of life".¹³⁰ Although males were predominant in the performance of many of these rites, there were also special places set aside for women's separate

¹²⁷ Bell, Diane. 'Aboriginal Women's Religion: A Shifting Law of the Land' in Edwards. W.H.(ed.) *Traditional Aboriginal Society* (2nd ed.) South Yarra. McMillan. 1998. p.254

¹²⁸ Stanner, W.E.H. *op.cit.*, p.147

¹²⁹ Charlesworth, Max. (ed.) *Religion in Aboriginal Australia*. St Lucia. University of Queensland Press. 1989. p.11

¹³⁰ Rose, Deborah Bird. 'Consciousness and Responsibility in an Australian Aboriginal Religion' in Edwards. W.H.(ed.) *Traditional Aboriginal Society* (2nd ed.) South Yarra. McMillan. 1998. p.244

rituals.¹³¹ Closely associated with the rites of increase were the numerous rites of passage which included the important initiation rites. The male initiation ceremony in particular, not only celebrated the transition from childhood to adulthood but also instructed and initiated the candidate into the knowledge necessary to perform religious ritual. O'Donoghue commented that mainland customs often included practices such as circumcision, sub incision, tooth avulsion that marked the candidate as having been initiated into the secrets of ceremonial life.¹³² Although economic considerations should not be overlooked, it is the myths, beliefs and ritual that make up the dreaming that ultimately defines the mainland Aboriginal's relationship with their land. The importance of this spiritual connection is well documented in Australian Aboriginal anthropology, A.P. Elkin explaining that:

The most important aspect of the local group, however, is spiritual in nature...From one point of view, the members who belong to the local group by birth own their subdivision of the tribal territory. But it is truer to say that the country owns them and that they cannot remain away from it indefinitely and still live...¹³³

This position is supported by Maddock:

Aborigines regard land as a religious phenomenon...The tie between men and land is taken back to the Dreaming...The Aboriginal theory is thus that rights to land have to do with the design of the world, not with alienable legal title...It would be as correct to speak of the land possessing men as of men possessing land.¹³⁴

In contrast to this clear nexus between the land and spirituality on mainland Australia, no such obvious connection is evident in Tasmanian ethnographic material. There are

¹³¹ Bell, Diane. *op.cit.*, pp. 260-261

¹³² O'Donoghue, Michael 'Sacred Ritual and Rites of Passage' in Habel, N., O'Donoghue, M., Maddox, M. (eds.) *Myth, Ritual and the Sacred*. Underdale. University of South Australia. 1993. pp. 75 - 76.

¹³³ Hamilton, Annette. 'Descended from Father, Belonging to Country: Rights to Land in the Australian Western Desert' in Edwards, W.H.(ed.) *Traditional Aboriginal Society* (2nd ed.) South Yarra. McMillan. 1998. p.92

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.92

no records of rites of increase or rites of initiation or the normal signs associated with such practices. There is no evidence that Tooth evulsion took place anywhere in Tasmania¹³⁵ and the practices of circumcision or subincision were unknown.¹³⁶ The myths that serve the 'dreaming' function of combining ancestral beings, a landmark and people.¹³⁷ - a formula that forms the basis for many mainland land claims are virtually unknown in Tasmania. Julia Clark¹³⁸ could only find one myth that conformed to this pattern, a myth originating from Bruny Island that relates to Cox's Bight in the remote South West of Tasmania, home of the Neewonee people. The tale relates the story of the large stone which stands at Cox's Bight, it says that the rock is the ancestral being or star god, *Moihernee*, who, after fighting with *Droemendeener* fell from heaven and dwelt for a while on land before dying and turning into this stone.¹³⁹ *Moihernee's* wife came after him to live in the sea. *Droemendeener*, *Moihernee's* combatant is associated with the star Canopus.¹⁴⁰ There is no mention of this place becoming a site of power for local Aborigines. The myth is remarkable for being the only one of its kind recorded in Tasmania, as myths and songs of this type are commonplace amongst mainland Aborigines. Although stories that contain the main elements¹⁴¹ usually associated with 'dreaming tales' are rare, stories and practices orientated towards the heavens, linking stars with the source of rivers and fire as well as the origins of men are more common.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, op.cit., p.7

¹³⁶ Roth, Ling. H. op.cit., p.116

¹³⁷ Clark, Julia. 'Devils and Horses: Religious and Creative Life in Tasmanian Aboriginal Society' in Roe, Michael (ed.) *The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies*. Canberra. Australian Academy of the Humanities. 1987. p.59

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.59

¹³⁹ *ibid.*,

¹⁴⁰ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines*. op.cit., p.62

¹⁴¹ Stanner. W.E.H. 'The Dreaming' in Edwards. W.H.(ed.) *Traditional Aboriginal Society* (2nd. ed.) South Yarra. McMillan. 1998. p.230

¹⁴² Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, op.cit., p.62

The dead were returned to the heavens by cremation and corroborees were held under the full moon. It has been suggested that the latter practice was simply because the natives were afraid of the dark and felt more secure in the moon light.¹⁴³ If this were the case it would have been simpler to hold corroborees in the daylight. As there are no recorded initiation ceremonies among Tasmanian Aborigines the corroboree would appear to have a different function than it did for mainland Aborigines. Plomley noted that the "...corroboree related to initiation to adulthood and the legends of the spirit beings of the type which are such a feature of Australian Aboriginal life was just not witnessed".¹⁴⁴ Plomley concluded that most corroborees were no more than leisure activities, song and dance around the campfire at night based on topical events.¹⁴⁵ This is a reference to the fact that Aboriginal dancing usually celebrated natural phenomena such as the Emu and Kangaroo dances and after European arrival the Horse dance,¹⁴⁶ although Robinson does refer to a women's dance¹⁴⁷ in homage to the fire spirits.¹⁴⁸ On other occasions the object of the celebration may have been the moon itself, we know from cicatrice designs that the moon was considered auspicious. Bonwick agreed with this proposition reporting that the moon "shared in the affections of the rude tribes...the dances held under her mild light were doubtless associated with respect for her." The early settler G.T. Lloyd also commented on this:

Amongst the neighbouring tribes of aborigines it was customary to meet at some time-honoured trysting-place at every full moon, a period regarded by them with most profound reverence. Indeed, judging from their extraordinary gestures in the dance - the upturned eye and out-stretched arm, apparently in a supplicating spirit - I have

¹⁴³ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.54

¹⁴⁴ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, *op.cit.*, p.62

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.62

¹⁴⁶ Clark, Julia. *op.cit.*, p.61

¹⁴⁷ It should be noted that Tasmanian Aboriginal corroborees were generally community affairs with Men, Women and Children all participating in the activities.

¹⁴⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.300

been often disposed to conclude that the poor savages were invoking the mercy and protection of that planet as their guardian deity.¹⁴⁹

The only rite of passage recorded as being observed by the Tasmanian Aborigines was that of Death. The rituals surrounding the death of a tribal member involved a considerable period of grieving with the singing of dirges every morning.¹⁵⁰ Robinson was also informed that "when a relative dies they give themselves up to grief. They break their spears and necklace, throw away kangaroo skins, cut their baskets, don't red ochre themselves, are quite neglectful and mourn".¹⁵¹ There are a number of eye witness accounts that describe customs surrounding the cremation process. The following observation is by James Backhouse on Flinders Island:

One of the women died. The men formed a pile of logs, and at sunset placed the body of the woman upon it, supported by small wood, which concealed her, and formed a pyramid...At daybreak the pile was set on fire, and fresh wood added as any part of the body became exposed, till the whole was consumed. The ashes of the dead were collected in a kangaroo skin, and every morning, before sunrise, till they were consumed, a portion of them was smeared over the faces of the survivors, and a death song was sung, with great emotion, tears clearing away lines among the ashes. The store of ashes, in the mean time, was suspended about one of their necks.¹⁵²

Although there are reports that the corpse was faced to the east before cremation,¹⁵³ Robinson, after witnessing the cremation of Lawerick,¹⁵⁴ a Tarkiner woman on Hunter Island noted that: "...I observe that they do not face the corpse to the east, but are regulated by the wind and this with a view to its being quickly consumed..."¹⁵⁵ There

¹⁴⁹ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.54

¹⁵⁰ Backhouse, James and Taylor, Charles. *The Life and Labours of George Washington Walker*. London. A.W.Bennett. 1862. p.120

¹⁵¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.892

¹⁵² Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.120

¹⁵³ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.273 citing Mansell, Michael and Legislative Council Select Committee Report *Aboriginal Lands*. Hobart. Parliament of Tasmania.2000. p.42 Michael Mansell citing Ryan, Lyndall.

¹⁵⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence*. Hobart. Blubberhead Press. 1987 p.803

¹⁵⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.658

are also many descriptions of ashes and bones of deceased friends and relations being kept as relics for protection and healing¹⁵⁶ such as the following report concerning the death of a Tarkiner man called Heedeweek (Hee.deek):

This person has the ashes of his deceased brother tied up in a piece of kangaroo skin about the size of a quartern loaf and which he carries about with him as an amulet or charm, and takes particular care of this memento of this deceased relative. This is a species of idolatry. Often have I seen the natives in conversation with those relics. It was told me that this man gave his brother's ashes water from an idea he was dry. This ceremony is performed by placing the amulet, i.e. ashes, close to the side of the body about the abdomen and pressing it hard whilst the person drank water. They then imagined it was communicated to the ashes of the deceased and afforded them relief.¹⁵⁷

The Aborigines in North West Tasmania obviously saw no need to provide permanent resting places for the remains of the deceased, nor was the site chosen for cremation of any consequence.¹⁵⁸ North West customs regarding disposal of the dead, stand in sharp contrast to burial practices on the mainland, where, because of the connection to land established by dreamtime lore, special places were set aside for this purpose. A.A.Saxe provided a useful explanation for the use and reason for these cemeteries:

To the degree that corporate group rights to use and/or control crucial but restricted resources are attained and/or legitimized by means of lineal descent from the dead (i.e. lineal ties to ancestors), such groups will maintain formal disposal areas for the exclusive disposal of their dead, and conversely.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. *op.cit.*, p.57

¹⁵⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.874

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 636 - 637

¹⁵⁹ Pardoe, Colin. 'The cemetery as symbol: the distribution of prehistoric Aboriginal burial grounds in southeastern Australia' in Murray, Tim (ed.) *op.cit.*, p.185

The importance placed on particular sites for some of the Aboriginal cemetery grounds found on the mainland is indicated by their association with contiguous burials spanning 6-7,000 years.¹⁶⁰

One cannot but be amazed at the constant references to the 'Devil' and his primacy in the descriptions of Aboriginal beliefs throughout early European records and the ease, trust and use Aborigines had for this demon.¹⁶¹ More liberal chroniclers of the period, such as visiting Quaker James Backhouse quickly realised that this was a misunderstanding and that the Aborigines were referring to a more benign spirit than Lucifer:

These people have received a few faint ideas of the existence and superintending providence of God; but they still attribute the strong emotions of their minds to the Devil, who, they say, tells them this or that, and to whom they attribute the power of prophetic communication. It is not clear that by the devil, they mean, anything more than a spirit; but they say, he lives in their breasts, on which account they shrink from having the breasts touched.¹⁶²

The nature of the spirit depicted as residing in the left breast, is a sophisticated concept indicating some variant on the soul/body dichotomy. Although the spirit/soul is described as a permanent feature of the Aboriginal's being, like an embodied soul, it also contains qualities akin to those of a Shaman's spirit.¹⁶³ A phenomenon that was confirmed by an account Robinson gave of Mannalargenna's powers when he asserted "The chief Mannalargenna was believed to be able to foretell events, acting as the

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.194

¹⁶¹ The Devil, no doubt, made his time honoured appearance as he has done in other primal religions through the prejudices of righteous observers who introduced his presence as a handy device with which to denigrate and undermine pagan deities.

¹⁶² Backhouse, James. *op.cit.*, p.181

¹⁶³ Campbell, Joseph. *Oriental Mythology: The Masks Of God*. New York, Arkana. 1991 p.456

mouthpiece of his *devil*, transmission of the *devil's* intelligence being associated with a shaking of his left shoulder and left breast described as similar to a person with palsy".¹⁶⁴ Magical rites amongst the Aborigines were also recorded, with Robinson reporting a chief standing in the midst of a tribe using a firestick in a rite to change the direction of the wind.¹⁶⁵ The relationship between the soul and the body, as understood by Aborigines in Tasmania, was also associated with a belief that the soul was able to survive the death of the body. An understanding of the separation of body and soul at physical death is indicated by the Quaker missionary James Backhouse when he explained that they "do not consider a person completely dead till the sun goes down".¹⁶⁶ Anthony Cottrell reported an instance when sick Aborigines were placed around a body that awaited cremation the following morning in the belief that when the soul of the dead woman came out during the night, she, (the dead woman) would cure them.¹⁶⁷ The survival of the soul was also accompanied by a belief akin to reincarnation in that they envisioned a future existence in the form a physical presence on earth following death. Pevay informed Robinson that when he died "he walked about from one tribe to another".¹⁶⁸ This was a firmly entrenched notion and obviously a source of courage when confronted with death. The day before Pevay was hung in Melbourne the *Port Phillip Herald* reported that he seemed "in a state of perfect unconcern".¹⁶⁹ After the hanging the following day the same paper reported that Pevay was "perfectly unconcerned and even gay; he laughed heartily when his attendant was assisting him to put on the stockings, and expressed his unconcern at his approaching fate, saying, that after his death he would join his

¹⁶⁴ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines. op.cit.*, p.61

¹⁶⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.300

¹⁶⁶ Backhouse, James. *op.cit.*, p.105

¹⁶⁷ Roth, Ling. H. *op.cit.*, p.120

¹⁶⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission, op.cit.*, p.185

¹⁶⁹ *Port Phillip Herald*, Melbourne, January 18th 1842

father in Van Diemen's Land and hunt kangaroo; he also said that he had three heads, one for the scaffold, one for the grave, and one for V.D. Land".¹⁷⁰

Apart from the deceased's remains being literally 'cast to the wind', there was little chance of tribal lands in Tasmania 'possessing' tribal members in the manner described earlier by Elkin and Maddock. Unlike the mainland tribes whose size allowed marriage to take place within the one tribe, Tasmania tribal units were too small to be a interbreeding unit.¹⁷¹ Consequently, there would have been an understanding from early childhood, that there was always a strong prospect of at some stage having to leave one's land of birth to seek a partner from another tribe. Jorgenson cited the instance of a Port Davey woman who travelled some seventy miles with Robinson in order to seek a husband from another tribe, noting that Aboriginal women had a strong aversion to marrying one of their relations and preferred to seek a husband well removed from her own band.¹⁷² It was not only the women who left their ancestral clan to join their partner's tribe, men are also recorded as leaving their tribe and lands. Wymeruck a man from the Parperloihener tribe of Robbins Island married Larratong from a tribe to the South along the West Coast.¹⁷³ After joining Larratong and taking up residence with her people, Wymeruck not only took his place as a tribal member but was chosen by them to become their chieftain.¹⁷⁴

A regular opportunity for young people to meet prospective marriage partners from other tribal bands was provided by the seasonal gathering of related tribes, which was

¹⁷⁰ *Port Phillip Herald*, Melbourne, January 21, 1842

¹⁷¹ Plomley, Brian. *The Tasmanian Aborigines*. *op.cit.*, p.26

¹⁷² Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. *op.cit.*, p.55

¹⁷³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence*. *op.cit.*, p.803

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.836

also an occasion for coroborreos and other celebrations. Aboriginal families were strictly patriarchal and almost always monogamous with marriage taking place with both partners in their late teens. Robinson, when describing the Chieftain Wymeruck's band noted "The natives are very fond of their children, and the husbands of their wives. I know of no case of polygamy among them".¹⁷⁵ During Robinson's third visit to the North West in 1834 he recorded details of Aboriginal courtship rituals as natives described them:

...when the blackfellow is courting he steals at night to the object of his affections and wakes her by means of a stick which he takes with him made sharp at both ends and about four inches long. He wakes her by pricking her in the breast and stays with her all night, and whenever she attempts to sleep he has recourse to his sharp instrument. She refuses his caresses and a long time elapses before she consents. He visits her many and many nights ere she consents, and if he gains her they will retire together to the woods where they enjoy each other's charms. After a lapse of a short period they return to the tribe and are acknowledged as man and wife. As they do not marry in the same tribe it sometimes happens that the husband remains with his wife's tribe and he is acknowledged by them as one of their number. It more frequently occurs that the man returns with his bride to his own people.¹⁷⁶

However if the bride's parents objected to the match the groom would move into his wife's tribe and attempt to gain the consent of the parents. This was done by the making of presents such as choice game and beads as well as offering various services designed to gain favour. Should these strategies fail, the consequences of any elopement could be severe with the possibility that the girl's relatives might track her down to kill her.

¹⁷⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.644

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.888

The tribal gathering in the North West region of Tasmania was an integral part of the spring migration, the signal for the tribes to prepare for this annual exodus was the flowering of the Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) in late September or early October.¹⁷⁷ The flowering of the Blackwood was believed to coincide with the arrival of the muttonbirds -Short-Tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) at their North West rookeries. The return of the muttonbird was in turn probably a seasonal signal that it was time to move into the far North West coastal shore and Islands to take advantage of other foods now available such as seals.¹⁷⁸ Although some adult muttonbirds were consumed by Aborigines, there are descriptions of them being roasted on spits after the feathers had been singed off,¹⁷⁹ the main source of food derived from the muttonbird was most likely the eggs.¹⁸⁰ Archaeological remains found in middens suggest that the birds themselves provided only a small part of the Aboriginal diet.¹⁸¹ The current practice of harvesting and salting fledgelings began with the sealers in the Furneaux Group of Islands. After severely depleting seal stocks,¹⁸² the muttonbirds became the Islanders economic mainstay, initially for feathers, eggs and oil and then for the salted chicks.¹⁸³ There was a short term market for mutton bird feathers in the mattress making industry, however, the feathers proved unsuitable giving off an unpleasant odour. The surveyor John Helder Wedge remarked on the experience "...I slept on a bed made from the feathers of the mutton bird the effluvia of which was such as will by no means make me anxious to regale my

¹⁷⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, op.cit., p.633

¹⁷⁸ Skira, Irynej. *Tasmanian Aborigines and Muttonbirding: A Historical Examination*. Ph.D Thesis. University of Tasmania. 1993. p.41

¹⁷⁹ Roth, Ling. H. op.cit., p.120

¹⁸⁰ Skira, Irynej. op.cit., p.41

¹⁸¹ Bowdler, Sandra. *An Account of an Archaeological Reconnaissance of Hunter's Isles, North-West Tasmania. 1973/74*. Canberra. Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies. The Australian National University. 1974

¹⁸² Lindsey, Terence. R. *The Seabirds of Australia*. North Ryde, Angus & Robertson Publishers. 1986 pp. 294 -300

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, p.xx

olfactory nerves with again."¹⁸⁴ The idea of salting and storing these young birds in barrels, originated, like many of the sealers, from Britain. There was a long tradition of harvesting young seabirds in this manner on the northern British islands. Birds that included the Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) from the Isle of Man and the Orkneys and the little storm petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) on the Faroe Islands.¹⁸⁵

After wintering in their beehive villages¹⁸⁶ the North and the North West tribes would congregate at the mouths of the coastal rivers in early spring to collect the eggs of swans, ducks and other water birds prior to commencing their trek along the coast. They would then travel along coastal paths towards the far North West eating shellfish along the way taking advantage of the seasonal variety of food. James Hobbs while exploring the North West Coast in 1824 observed that it was very mountainous and barren and that "the water side is the best road, as the natives travel that way and keep it burnt".¹⁸⁷ The visiting North Tribe would give ochre extracted from their mines around Mt. Van Dyke as gifts to their hosts in return for safe passage through their lands.¹⁸⁸ After visiting Cape Grim, excursions were made to Robbins Island where shells were collected to make necklaces for decoration and for trade.¹⁸⁹ These necklaces were highly prized and described as being of a brilliant, pearly blue colour. James Backhouse commented on their manufacture "they are perforated by means of the eye teeth, and are strung on a kangaroo sinew; they are then exposed to the action

¹⁸⁴ Wedge, John Helder. *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824 - 1835*. Mr. Justice Crawford, Messrs. W.F.Ellis, G.M. Stancombe. Hobart. The Royal Society of Tasmania. 1962. p.2

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.xix

¹⁸⁶ Ryan, Lyndall, *op.cit.*, p.39

¹⁸⁷ Hobbs, James in Calder, James (ed.) *The Circumnavigations of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 By James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs*, Hobart, Sullivan's Cove, 1984. p.46

¹⁸⁸ Clark, Julia. *The Aboriginal People of Tasmania*. Hobart, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1983. p.31

¹⁸⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.866

of *Pyroligneous* acid in the smoke of brushwood covered up with grass; and in the smoke they are turned and rubbed till the external coat comes off, after which, they are polished with oil obtained from the penguin or the mutton bird".¹⁹⁰ Calder observed that in captivity at Oyster Cove the process of removing the outer covering to reveal the mother-of-pearl was accomplished by using vinegar.¹⁹¹

During these seasonal journeys many large rivers and Island passages had to be negotiated which was achieved by constructing catamarans and floats for the purpose.¹⁹² Robinson remarked on the familiarity the Aborigines had for these offshore Islands "The elderly natives know this place well [Hunter Island] and have names for all parts of this and the other islands. They crossed over from Cape Grim to Trefoil, thence to an island [Bird Island] midway between Trefoil and the Hunter, and thence to the Hunter; crossed over in catamarans".¹⁹³ The Robbins Island/Cape Grim area was a good choice for these large gatherings as the timing and place of any assembly of this sort was entirely dependent on the availability of a dependable supply of food. This was provided by an abundant supply of shellfish, eggs and seals supplemented by local game such as wallaby and coastal birds. In a similar manner large gatherings of Aborigines in the Victorian Alps were dependent on the arrival of the Bogong moth (*Agrotis infusa*). These moths were a rich source of nutrition containing the high fat content needed to survive in a cold climate, fulfilling the same dietary requirements that seals provided in Tasmania.¹⁹⁴ As the season drew on, many of the tribes gradually moved on to the inland summer hunting grounds

¹⁹⁰ Backhouse, James. *op.cit.*, p.84

¹⁹¹ Calder, James (ed.) *op.cit.*, p.36

¹⁹² Robson, Lloyd, *op.cit.*, pp.18 - 19

¹⁹³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.641

¹⁹⁴ Flood, J. *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, *op.cit.*, pp. 202-203

located around the Hampshire and Surrey Hills (Appendix 8) before returning once again to their tribal lands and village sites. This return marked the completion of the tribes annual migration pattern.

Although Aborigines in Tasmania possessed none of the well publicised religious connections to the land associated with mainland Aborigines, links formalised by rites, ceremonies and dreaming lore, they had nevertheless, a deep and unswerving attachment and loyalty to their land. Their family hearth groups were organised into flourishing viable tribal societies that thrived for millennia on the bounty offered by rich hunting grounds, forests and coastal waters. This form of organisation accorded with Vattel's depiction of the foundation of a nation and the establishment of collective ownership and sovereignty:

If a number of free families, scattered over an independent country, come together to form a Nation or State, they acquire as a body sovereignty over the entire territory they inhabit.¹⁹⁵

John West, not only recognised the indigenous people's relationship to the land but also chastised the British Authorities for their failure to do the same: "The English, of modern times, will not comprehend joint ownership, notwithstanding the once 'common' property of the nation has been only lately distributed by law. The rights of the aborigines were never recognised by the crown..."¹⁹⁶

The Aborigines made good use of their land, accessing the wide variety of resources necessary for the maintenance of a viable and stable society. They mined and

¹⁹⁵ Vattel de, Emer. *op.cit.*, p.84

¹⁹⁶ West, John. *op.cit.*, pp. 272 -273

processed the minerals they required, quarried and fashioned their tools, and farmed both land and sea using technologies appropriate to their needs. Tasmanian indigenous people displayed an intimate knowledge of their land as they moved from summer to winter stations at fixed periods regulated by the seasons along well defined roads. John West commented "Every mountain, valley and river is distinguished and named. The English have often been indebted to these primitive surveyors, for guidance through the forests which they came to divide... the boundaries of each horde were known, and trespass was a declaration of war".¹⁹⁷ Naming was precise with every major feature and part of a river, inlet or mountain individually identified (Appendix 7). Some Aboriginal place names incorporated elements that identified the tribal owners of that particular territory.¹⁹⁸

Aborigines in Tasmania exhibited a clear sense of ownership and attachment to their lands, evident to all those who knew them. Robinson, who had extensive contact with Aborigines throughout the Island during his employment to remove them from their lands was forced to conclude: "The natives of VDL are patriots, staunch lovers of their country".¹⁹⁹

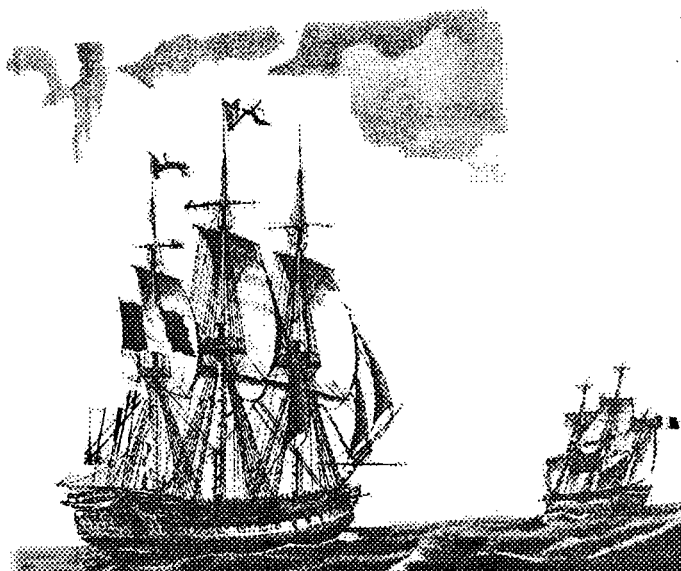
¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 272 -273

¹⁹⁸ Taylor, J.A. *Tasmanian Place Names - The Aboriginal Connection*. Launceston. Bokprint Pty. Ltd. p.27

¹⁹⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.302

Chapter Two

First Contacts



Capitaine N. Baudin Corvettes Géographe et le Naturaliste 1802¹

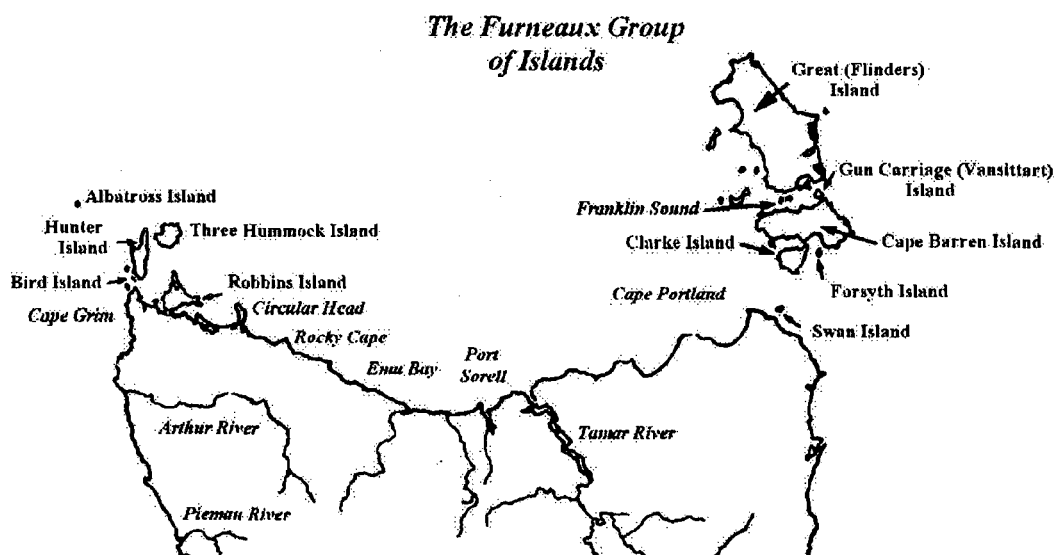
On the morning of the 6 December 1798, members of the Tommeginer tribe would have been astonished to see the sails of the 25 ton sloop *Norfolk*, as it rounded Table Cape beating its way towards Circular Head in the face of a south westerly gale.² The vessel, crewed by eight volunteers and commanded by navigator Matthew Flinders and naturalist George Bass was carrying the first Europeans ever to penetrate the lands of the North West tribes. Aborigines taking part in the spring migration may also have secretly observed Bass and Flinders landing on Three-Hummock Island in search of water and provisions. Although the explorers saw no Aborigines, they did

¹ Drawing from 'fair' journal - Archives Nationales, Marine 5JJ 35, p.1 reprinted in Baudin, Nicolas. *The Journal of Nicolas Baudin*. Cornell, Christine (Tr.) Adelaide. Libraries Board of South Australia. 1974.

² Flinders, Matthew. *Voyage To Terra Australis*. 3 Vols. (1814). Adelaide. Libraries Board of South Australia. 1966. p.cixvii

note their presence through the evidence of abandoned campfires³ and abalone shells left over from earlier meals.⁴ Realising that the island was too small to support a permanent population the crew of the *Norfolk* were perplexed as to how the Aborigines had managed to visit an island over twenty miles offshore. Flinders, noting that the Aborigines at Port Dalrymple had no knowledge of watercraft⁵ had wrongly assumed the same situation would hold true for all the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. The morning of the 9 December brought an improvement in the weather and with the aid of a gentle south east breeze the *Norfolk* again put to sea. After obtaining a supply of seal carcasses and albatross at Albatross Island a few miles to the west of Three-Hummock Island, Flinders proceeded to round Cape Grim on his circumnavigation of Tasmania, satisfied with his discovery of a new passage into the Southern Indian Ocean.

Bass Strait



³ Bass and Flinders' difficulty in making direct contact with Aborigines was to prove a common experience for many explorers in North West Tasmania where the Aborigines chose to remain concealed while they observed the habits of the intruders.

⁴ Flannery, Tim (ed.) *Terra Australis*. Melbourne. Text Publishing. 2000. p.23

⁵ Flinders, Matthew. *Observations on the Coasts of Van Diemen's Land, on Bass's Strait and its Islands*. (1801). Adelaide. Libraries Board of South Australia. 1965. p.20

Exactly four years after the *Norfolk's* visit another expedition ventured among the western islands of Bass Strait, that of Nicolas Baudin in December 1802. This French expedition consisted of three vessels, the French corvettes *Géographe* and *Naturaliste* as well as the schooner *Casuarina*, recently purchased from the British settlement at Port Jackson. After Baudin established a base camp at Sea Elephant Bay on King Island, the *Casuarina* under the command of Louis Freycinet was sent to survey the Hunter Islands and the adjacent mainland coast.⁶ Owing to bad weather, this survey was to take seventeen days to accomplish with the *Casuarina* grounding twice in Robbins passage. Despite this lengthy period of observation along the coast, at least two landings on Hunters Island and one landing at Coloumb Bay on Three-Hummock Island, Freycinet was unable to make direct contact with the Aborigines. However, the naming of *pointe de la fumée* (smoky point = Point Cassard) on the west coast of Hunter Island suggests the sighting of either Aboriginal camp fires or smoke signals.⁷

The motives of the initiators of the British and French expeditions could not have been more different; a divergence in foreign policies that was to have far reaching consequences for the indigenous population. Although Flinders primary task was to chart the coastline of Van Diemen's Land and establish the existence of Bass Strait, the voyage of the *Norfolk* was not one of disinterested scientific investigation. Governor John Hunter, who encouraged the venture, was not only keen to map out suitable areas for future colonial expansion but he also wished to augment and underpin the economic viability of the newly established colony of New South Wales. Accordingly, when the *Norfolk* left Port Jackson she was accompanied as far as the

⁶ Baudin, Nicolas *op.cit.*, pp. 438-439

⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *The Baudin Expedition and the Tasmanian Aborigines 1802. op.cit.*, p.102

Furneaux Islands by the brig *Nautilus* whose crew established a sealing industry at Kent Bay on Cape Barren Island.⁸ The sealers from the *Nautilus* then proceeded to set a standard for unrestricted exploitation and greed that was to become the hallmark of that most rapacious and notorious industry. The ship's Master, Charles Bishop, reported averaging 200 seal skins a day, and after less than two months on the island and clubbing to death some 9,000 seals⁹ the *Nautilus* returned to Port Jackson with 5,200 skins and 300 gallons of oil.¹⁰ Bass and Flinders continued to supply Hunter with information of commercial interest, such as the quantity and quality of seal furs on the Western Islands in Bass Strait as well as the sighting of an estimated one hundred million sooty petrels (mutton birds) flying in formation off Three-Hummock Island.¹¹ It was reports such as these, as well as Bass's charts, that provided the signposts for further penetration of Bass Strait by the sealers and future colonisation by the British Government.

Baudin's expedition, by way of contrast, was the latest in a succession of French scientific voyages of discovery into the Southern Hemisphere, that included those of Nicholas Marion du Fresne (1772), La Pérouse (1788) and d'Entrecasteaux (1792) (1793). Like the earlier expeditions, Baudin's was one of pure scientific enquiry, neither an instrument of French colonial ambitions nor an element of any of the Napoleonic intrigues suspected by Governor King.¹² Apart from the overwhelming material proof indicating the scientific nature of the expedition, an application was made to the British Admiralty for passports for the French ships prior to their

⁸ Flannery, Tim. *op.cit.*, p.13

⁹ Davison, Graeme, Hirst, John, Macintyre, Stuart. (eds.) *The Oxford Companion To Australian History*. Melbourne. Oxford University Press. 1998. p.577

¹⁰ Fowler, R.M. *The Furneaux Group. Bass Strait. Volume One*. Canberra, A Roebuck Book, 1980 pp.35-37

¹¹ Flannery, Tim. *op.cit.*, pp. 23-25

¹² Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.32

departure. As the nations were at war at the time, it is unlikely that Earl Spencer, who was the First Lord of the Admiralty, would have granted the passports if anything other than genuine research was suspected.¹³

From the very beginning of these expeditions the French government made clear its intentions to respect the sovereignty and rights of indigenous peoples wherever they found them. This relatively progressive stance was mainly due to the influence of the Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). His early works such as *Discourse on the origin of inequality* stimulated an interest in the notion of the 'natural man' or 'noble savage' throughout French society, and despite his denial of the 'divine right of kings' his admirers included many from the French aristocracy. In 1786, King Louis XVI had issued the following instructions to La Pérouse on the eve of his voyage:

...He is to instruct all members of his crews to live in good understanding with the natives, to seek to win their friendship by good behaviour and attentions. He shall forbid them at the risk of very heavy punishment ever to use force in order to take from them what they would refuse to give up voluntarily. The said M. de La Pérouse is to exercise great gentleness and humanity towards the various tribes visited in the course of his voyage. He is to interest himself zealously in all measures that may improve their condition by procuring for their country useful European vegetables, fruits and trees, and by teaching them to sow and cultivate these, as well as instructing them how to make use of such presents, the purpose of which is to increase the produce necessary to tribes depending almost entirely on the soil for their food. Should compelling circumstances, which it is only prudent to foresee on a long expedition, ever force the said M. de La Pérouse to make use of his superior arms in order to procure, against the opposition of savage tribes, the necessities of life, such as victuals, wood and water, he is to employ force only in the greatest moderation and punish with the utmost rigour those of his men overstepping his orders. In all other

¹³ Triebel, L.A. and Batt, J.C. *French Exploration of Australia*. Hobart. University of Tasmania. 1957. pp. 44-45

cases, where he cannot gain the friendship of savages by kind treatment, he must try to restrain them by fear and threats. However, he must not have recourse to arms except as a last extremity, and then only in defence and when all consideration would clearly compromise the safety of his ships and the lives of the Frenchmen entrusted to his care. His Majesty would consider it to be one of the happiest results of the expedition if it could be ended without cost of single man's life.¹⁴

Rousseau's influence enhanced by the success of the French revolution continued to play a major role in French policy making, and many of his principles underpinned the planning of Baudin's expedition. Baudin's mission maintained the scientific focus established by those earlier expeditions and his vessels were supplied with the best scientific equipment available, as well as a compliment of twenty three scientists that included astronomers, geographers, mineralogists, botanists, zoologists, draughtsmen and horticulturists.¹⁵ This was to prove one of the greatest scientific expeditions undertaken in the nineteenth century, delivering to the Museum of Natural History some one hundred thousand specimens of animal life containing two thousand five hundred new species.¹⁶ The total number of specimens collected by the expedition numbered over two hundred thousand when dried seeds and plants were added to the figure.¹⁷ Peron's colleague, M.Lesueur prepared fifteen hundred drawings and paintings during the voyage which were subsequently presented to public collections. The contribution of Peron, the first trained anthropologist to make a direct study of tribal Aborigines was also of great significance.¹⁸ Peron's records of his six month sojourn with Aborigines in southern Tasmania continue to provide a valuable and

¹⁴ Peron.M.F. *Voyage To The Southern Hemisphere*. (1809) North Melbourne. Marsh Walsh Publishing. 1975. pp.18 - 19

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.10

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.iv

¹⁷ Plomley, Brian. Cornell, Christine. Banks, Max. *Francois Péron's Natural History of Maria Island, Tasmania*. Launceston. Records of the Queen Victoria Museum. No.99. 1990. p.5

¹⁸ Triebel, L.A. and Batt, J.C. *op.cit.*, p.58

unique insight into an ancient way of life just a few short years before its destruction.

There was, however, a considerable human cost borne by the expedition, with the Imperial Institute Report concluding:

We have to close...with a lamentable catalogue of disasters which happened to the gentlemen who accompanied the expedition. *Out of the twenty-three persons recommended by you to the first Consul, only three have returned to their country, after performing the entire voyage.*¹⁹

The original plan for the expedition originated from the Institut de France and was drawn up by the committee of the Institute, a committee that included such prominent scientists as the Comte de Fleurieu, Laplace, Bougainville, Cuvier and Lacépède.²⁰

Baudin received the following plan and instructions from the Comte de Fleurieu:

...On all occasions, and by every means at his disposal, he will facilitate the operations of the astronomers and engineers and the research of the naturalists. So long as he sees no inconvenience in so doing, he will prolong his stay in those places which promise a more valuable harvest for Natural History and more interesting observations in Physics...The object of the present instructions has in no way been to trace for him the operations relative to Astronomy, Geography, the nautical arts, Physics and the various branches of Natural History with which he and the scientists under his command should be concerned during the voyage. It has not been to indicate to him the form of the records to be kept of astronomical, meteorological and other observations; nor has it been to tell him what precautions to take in the gathering and preservation of the different objects that each scientist must bring back to the central collection, without retaining a single one for himself. Furthermore, it has not been to inform him of the complete surrender that must be made to him, upon reaching *Ile-de-France* for the second time and before anchoring there, of the maps, charts, records, personal diaries and generally all papers relevant to the expedition. Nor has it been to show him how he must behave towards the natives of the countries he may visit, or to tell him of the manifold precautions to take for preserving the health of the crews. But in all these matters, whose importance he knows, he will follow the instructions which were given to General La Pérouse...²¹

¹⁹ Peron.M.F. *op.cit.*, p.viii

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.14

²¹ Baudin, Nicolas. *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6

Apart from demonstrating the continuity of purpose maintained since La Pérouse, de Fleurieu's instructions also revealed the relative importance the British and French authorities attached to scientific investigation in the new world. While the French state appointed, financed and equipped their scientists with a view to enriching public museums and knowledge, the British expeditions left the science to private individuals like Joseph Banks whose collections remained their own private property.²²

Governor King doubted the scientific nature of the French expedition and responding to military intelligence sent Acting Lieutenant Robbins in the armed schooner *Cumberland* to find Baudin and deliver a letter of protest.²³ Robbins caught up with Baudin on King Island on the 9 December 1802, when the French expedition was drawing to a close with the *Naturaliste* sailing for France on the day the *Cumberland* arrived. Baudin wrote of his surprise on receiving a visit from Robbins at this late stage and invited him to dinner on the *Géographe* where he was handed the following letter and charge from Governor King:

To the Commander of the Expedition etc.

You will no doubt be surprised to see a ship so close on your heels. You are acquainted with my intention to establish a settlement in the South; however it has been hastened by information communicated to me immediately after your departure. This information is to the effect that the French wish to set up an establishment in Storm Bay Passage [D'Entrecasteaux Channel] or in the area known as Frederik Hendrik Bay. It is also said that these are your orders from the French Republic...²⁴

Baudin clearly unimpressed by King's declaration noted in his journal that "The English claim on Van Diemen's Land was emphatically stated in the instructions of the

²² Plomley, Brian. Cornell, Christine. Banks, Max. *op.cit.*, p.3

²³ Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.32

²⁴ Baudin, Nicolas. *op.cit.*, p. 441

schooner's captain, but it rests merely on Captain Phillip's proclamation, the limits of which are recorded in what we know, from its beginnings, of the present settlement".²⁵

On the 14 December three days after Robbins had requested 12 lbs. (5.4 kg) of gunpowder from Baudin "...for he had nothing aboard to fire a gun with...",²⁶ Baudin was again surprised to find an English flag erected above the French tents.²⁷ Before finally departing for France, Baudin handed Robbins a letter for Governor King in which he described Robbins' action as a "childish ceremony",²⁸ maintained French innocence of King's charges and strongly denounced British intentions to dispossess the native peoples of their land:

To my way of thinking I have never been able to conceive that there was any justice or equity on the part of Europeans, in seizing, in the name of their governments, a land for the first time, when it is inhabited by men who have not always deserved the title of savages...From this it appears to me that it would be infinitely more glorious for your nation, as for mine, to mould for society the inhabitants of the various countries over which they have rights, instead of wishing to dispossess those who are so far removed by immediately seizing the soil which they own and which has given them birth. These remarks are no doubt impolite, but at least reasonable from the facts, and had this principle, been generally adopted, you would not have been obliged to form a colony by means of men branded by the law and who have become criminals through the fault of the Government which has neglected and abandoned them to themselves. It follows, therefore, that not only have you to reproach yourselves with an injustice in seizing their lands, but also in transporting on a soil where the crimes and diseases of the Europeans were unknown, all which has served as pretext to your Government. I have no knowledge of the claims which the French Government may have upon Van Diemen's Land, nor of its designs; but I think that its title will not be any better grounded than yours.²⁹

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.442

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.443

²⁷ Baudin thought at first that the flag was merely being hung up to dry until he saw a soldier standing guard with a bayonet.

²⁸ Triebel, L.A. and Batt, J.C. *op.cit.*, p.52

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 52-53

The French then sailed for France, while Governor King, sharing none of Baudin's reservations concerning the legality of Phillip's claims for continental sovereignty, proceeded to deploy the forces necessary to occupy Van Diemen's Land. King was anxious to secure Van Diemen's Land not just to forestall the French, but also to divide his convicts and gain access to timber and other resources.³⁰ Accordingly, a small expedition comprised of two vessels and forty nine people under the command of Lieutenant John Bowen sailed from Sydney to establish a British colony at Risdon cove in August 1803.³¹ In the meantime, commercial interests, unconcerned by the finer points of international law and stimulated by the earlier reports of Bass and Flinders had been far from idle in southern waters. The March 1803 edition of the *Sydney Gazette*³² that reported the return of the *Cumberland* from King Island also noted the departure of the *Diana* for the same destination in order to pick up a sealing party employed by Messrs. Kable and Underwood. In May of the same year the *Sydney Gazette*³³ reported the first reconnaissance by sealers into North West tribal lands by Captain J. Chase of the inappropriately named vessel *Good Intent*. Captain Chase reported that after taking on board 2,500 seal skins from King Island: "We afterwards overhauled Hunter's Islands, in search of seals, and found those islands, 12 or 13 in number, well peopled with natives...They appeared much terrified at our approach..."³⁴ Chase also noted the suitability of Hunter Island for future operations: "Hunter's Island on the East side contains a very fine and spacious bay, sheltered from the winds at N. by W, to SSE. abundantly supplied with water, as it also is with wood".³⁵ It is more than likely that Chase's report precipitated further

³⁰ Clark, Manning. *A History of Australia. Volume 1*. Carlton. Melbourne University Press. 1992. p.190

³¹ Kociumbas, Jan. *op.cit.*, p.94

³² *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*. Volume One, March 1803

³³ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*. Volume One. Number 11. May 15, 1803

³⁴ *ibid.*, Volume One. Number 11. May 15, 1803

³⁵ *ibid.*, Volume One. Number 11. May 15, 1803

visits to the Hunter Islands³⁶ by sealers, as James Kelly's experience on the island seems to indicate.

On the 12 December 1815, James Kelly left Hobart in the *Elizabeth* an open whale boat accompanied by four crewmen on a private expedition to explore the previously unmapped west coast of Van Diemen's Land. Kelly's party arrived at Hunter's Island on the 4 January 1816 after visiting and naming Macquarie Harbour where they discovered large stands of Huon Pine. The expeditioners soon made contact with a large band of Aborigines belonging to the North West Tribe. Owing to a misunderstanding, a mêlée ensued with Kelly's men shooting and wounding several Aborigines after they had been peppered with stones. The description of the event is confused and open to a number of interpretations, a problem all too common with the exaggerated accounts Kelly provides of the expedition's exploits during the voyage.³⁷ According to Kelly his party landed on shore and built a fire, they were then visited by a large group of Aborigines, at least fifty in number. The initial contact appears to have been friendly with the Chief entertaining Kelly with songs. The trouble seems to start when Briggs, one of his crewmen, brought two swans, intended as gifts, from the boat to the fire. On seeing Briggs, the Chief rushed to lay hold of him then ordered his men to throw stones at Kelly's party. Kelly opened fire on the Aborigines who ran, but two of them seized Briggs in an attempt to drag him away.³⁸ Kelly interpreted their actions as trying to steal the swans which would have been quite out of character. An alternative explanation is that they were provoked by the appearance of Briggs and that he was their target. George Briggs was a notorious

³⁶ Three Hummock island used to be known as East Hunter island.

³⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. op.cit., p.11

³⁸ Calder, James (ed.), op.cit., pp. 19-21

sealer who had operated in Bass Strait from the very beginning of the industry and had a long involvement in the kidnapping of Aboriginal women.³⁹ The latter interpretation makes more sense and provides some explanation for the aggressive behaviour displayed by the Aborigines, who, as noted earlier, tended to remain out of view and retreat at the sight of the Europeans who came into their lands.

The next expedition to visit the West coast was that of Allan Cunningham and Captain Phillip Parker King in 1819. Cunningham was one of those botanists selected by Joseph Banks to travel the world as official collectors of specimens for the Royal Gardens at Kew.⁴⁰ Cunningham and King sailed from Hobart in the *Mermaid* early in the new year⁴¹ to arrive at Macquarie Harbour on 15 January.⁴² They remained at Macquarie Harbour until 26 January, allowing sufficient time to collect specimens and make contact with the local Aborigines. After sighting many Aboriginal huts they finally met up with a large party of Aborigines near Pilot Bay.⁴³ Although the meetings were friendly, women and children were kept in the background as were a number of weapons that were clearly visible to the explorers. The suspicion displayed by the Aborigines may have been due to recent encounters with James Kelly and his men. James Kelly was still present at Macquarie Harbour when Cunningham and King had first arrived. Kelly, now in command of the *Sophia* had been engaged by the Government to harvest the Huon Pine he had discovered on his earlier voyage in the

³⁹ Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne "The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community". Sandy Bay, Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings. 1990. Vol.37, Nos. 2&3. p.74

⁴⁰ Kociumbas, Jan. *op.cit.*, p.131

⁴¹ McMinn, W.G. *Allan Cunningham: Botanist and Explorer*. Carlton. Melbourne University Press. 1970. p.40

⁴² Cunningham, Allen. Letter to W.T. Astor 29 March 1819. AJCP Microfilm Reel M692. Cunningham, Allen (1791 - 1839) Papers.

⁴³ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. *op.cit.*, p.11

Elizabeth.⁴⁴ Both King and Cunningham recorded particulars about Aboriginal dwellings, while Cunningham took this rare opportunity to prepare a word list of Aboriginal vocabulary. Cunningham's short vocabulary must have been of some practical value as Rosalie Hare records extracts from the list still in use at Circular Head in 1827.⁴⁵

Eyes	=	Nammurenk	Kangaroo	=	Kagaur
Nose	=	Meoune	A tree	=	Wyrui
Ears	=	Gounnek	Stone	=	Tallap
Teeth	=	Mim	Vessel to carry		
Neck	=	Treck	water	=	Moke
Arms	=	Yirawig	<i>Banksia australis</i>	=	Tangan
Knee	=	None	<i>Melaleuca sp.</i> (tea tree)	=	Rone
Hair of			<i>Acacia sp.</i> allied to <i>sophorae</i> .		
the Head	=	Pipe	Pods of which are eaten by		
Toes	=	Peune	the natives	=	Gurweer

Lieutenant Governor Sorell, seeking new sources of the pasture land deemed necessary to encourage further European emigration, sent Captain Charles Browne Hardwicke into the North West in 1823 to report on the potential for settlement.⁴⁶

Captain Hardwicke was unimpressed by what he found, reporting to Sorell:

...the whole interior to any greater extent that I have already spoken of West of Port Sorell is quite impenetrable and totally uninhabitable. - The Country which I spoke of to your Honour (Circular Head and to the Westward) commanding many advantages for a settlement, has not met my expectations; first from not being so extensively good as I expected from my remembrance of it; next that no communication can be had with it by land without much difficulty. It will therefore appear to Your Honor, that there is no expectation of giving vent to the tide of emigration to the Westward.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.12

⁴⁵ Hare, Rosalie. Ida Lee (ed.) *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen's Land and Batavia*. 1927. p.196

⁴⁶ Wedge, John Helder. *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824 - 1835*. op.cit., p.6

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.6

Hardwicke made little comment on the Aborigines in the region other than describing those sighted at Circular Head as "...extremely wild..." with "...one party running away at a great distance..." while Aborigines south of West Point were reported as "...numerous, and appear disposed to be friendly with Europeans, as we had communication with them".⁴⁸

Undeterred by Hardwicke's pessimism, Sorell engaged Captain James Hobbs for a more detailed exploration of the North West region in a further attempt to seek suitable grasslands. Captain Hobbs left Hobart on 5 February 1824, accompanied by James Carretts, and the command of two open boats with twelve selected convicts for crew. The small expedition had a stormy trip up the West Coast and stopped at Macquarie Harbour on the 28 March to effect repairs and explore some of the hinterland. After exploring the lower reaches of the Pieman River, Hobbs placed Carretts and two of the convicts ashore and had them walk up the Coast to Cape Grim (see Appendix Eight) while he proceeded by sea.⁴⁹ The undertaking of this exercise indicates that there was little fear of the Aborigines although numerous in the area. Carretts and his men were to make no mention of any contact or sighting of the local Aborigines as they passed through their tribal territories.⁵⁰ The shore party reported the land up the coast to be wholly unfit for agricultural purposes, an opinion Hobbs shared for the country from Circular Head to Port Sorell. However, Hobbs did have a little good news for Sorell in that the country immediately around Circular Head "...would make a most excellent estate for one or two persons, with capital, who would engage in the local whale fisheries, in addition to agricultural pursuits; since fish

⁴⁸ Hardwicke, Captain. *op.cit.*, p.2

⁴⁹ Hobbs, Captain James. *Report of a Boat Survey round the Island of Van Diemen's Land, from 5th February to 10th July, 1824*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1824. p.3

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.3

are to be caught in great abundance..."⁵¹ The only mention in Hobbs' final report of an Aboriginal presence in the region was to be found in his advice that the best road from Circular Head to Port Sorell was along the coast as "...the natives travel that way and keep it burnt".⁵²

Apart from these official expeditions into the North West region, at least one group of unofficial visitors also made an appearance, the sealers. In 1820, three years before Hardwicke's survey, a group of sealers attacked a band of Aborigines at Cape Grim. It was a serious incident that could explain the difference in behaviours reported by Hardwicke between the Aborigines at nearby Circular Head and those he contacted south of West Point. Penderoin, a member of the Parperloihener tribe and an eyewitness to the attack, recounted how his band when travelling along the coast near Cape Grim (Laggener) had made camp at a spot on the coast adjacent to two islets called the Doughboys (Layhooner), a favourite spot for gathering muttonbirds. The men, as was usual, went away to hunt kangaroo leaving the women, children and some old men to collect muttonbirds. Not long after the men had left, nine sealers burst out of a nearby cavern in which they were hidden and attacked the group. The sealers had walked overland from the north of the Cape during the night to prepare for the ambush. Hemmed in by a wedge in the cliffs, there was no escape for the Aborigines and the sealers picked out twelve to fourteen women and took them away, even taking the store of muttonbirds that had been gathered.⁵³ Alexander McKay related another version of the incident to Robinson having heard of it from one of the sealers involved. In his account, seven women were abducted in the raid.⁵⁴ McKay

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.4

⁵² *ibid.*, p.4

⁵³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.845

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.203

told of one old man who climbed a Banksia tree and, in attempting to defend the women, threw a spear at a sealer but it caught in his clothing. The sealers opened fire, killing him as well as another elder and spreading panic amongst the Aborigines. Some of the women attempted to swim to safety, but the sealers pursued them in a rowing boat. The women who included Kie.peker, Larpeeno.puric, Nie.pee.kar, Moon.dap.per, Reetar.hibar and Troe.pow.er.he.ar., were taken to Kangaroo Island and were never seen again.⁵⁵ Unprovoked and unpredictable attacks of this nature had a devastating effect on the lifestyle of maritime tribes in the North West. Reliant on the immediate coastline for their major sources of food and lines of communication, they were especially vulnerable to these sea borne raids.

The main object of these raids was the Aboriginal women. After the sealers moved into Banks and Bass Straits in the early 1800s, Calder noted that it was common for these men to acquire from two to five "...of these native women for their own use and benefit, and to select any of them they thought proper to cohabit with as their wives..."⁵⁶ There is little doubt that this custom of appropriating Aboriginal women from their tribes contributed significantly to the demise of the Aboriginal population in the North of the Colony. This was particularly the case in the East and North East, the main focus of sealing activity, rather than the North West.⁵⁷ When Robinson prepared a roll call of the eastern peoples in 1831 he found only four women remaining out of a total of sixty six.⁵⁸ Earlier in November 1830 he had reported that

⁵⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence, op.cit.*, pp. 803 -830

⁵⁶ Calder, James (ed.) *op.cit.*, p.26

⁵⁷ see Appendix Ten for more details.

⁵⁸ Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community*. Sandy Bay. Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings. Vol.37. Nos 2&3, June-September 1990. p.54.

in the North East there were "only three females among seventy two males".⁵⁹ There is a widespread belief that it was common practice for Aborigines to use their wives as a 'means of exchange' in trade with the Sealers.⁶⁰ This is an important question that warrants close examination, as it is a view that leads to the supposition that the Aborigines contributed in part to their own extinction. If Aborigines were to have treated their women in this way, it would have been totally at odds with recorded accounts of their cultural norms and traditions. Although there were no formal marriage ceremonies amongst the Aborigines, once an agreed relationship was established it couldn't be dissolved unless the husband gave consent which then released the former wife to seek another partner. Should a spouse die, parental responsibility for any children from the previous union passed to the new partner on remarriage.⁶¹ Adultery was rare, and harshly punished. Jorgenson reported a case whereupon a couple being found guilty of the charge were sentenced to death by the Chief who ordered the "adulterer to be speared by the tribe before the wife's face, and when he was slain, the husband was ordered to beat her brains out with waddies, which was punctually executed".⁶² The strict moral codes attached to marriage and kinship customs left little scope for flexibility. Accordingly the codes governing relationships with Europeans were both strict and disapproving. In another instance, a young female Aborigine from Cape Grim formed a voluntary relationship with a European member of a boats crew. The tribe objecting to the relationship, watched her closely, awaiting an opportunity to attack. Eventually she was wounded several times and had a spear "planted in her neck".⁶³ Fortunately for her

⁵⁹ McMahon, Anne. *Tasmanian Aboriginal Women as Slaves*. Sandy Bay. Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings. Vol.23. No.2. June 1976. pp. 44-45

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.45 also see Ryan, Lyndall, *op.cit.*, p.69

⁶¹ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.12

⁶² Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. *op.cit.*, p. 55

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.59

she survived the attack, but lived in constant fear of her own tribe from that moment on.

The argument that women were the object of trade is also based on the scantiest of evidence; the overwhelming bulk of data on the subject indicates that the women were by and large stolen and taken from their people by force. William Stewart, a Sydney Trader, gave evidence to New South Wales Colonial Secretary Campbell in 1815, that the sealers customarily obtained such women "...by force..." and kept them "...as slaves..."⁶⁴ He went on to describe the women's situation:

...hunting and foraging for them, who they transfer and dispose of from one to another as their own property; very few of whom ever see their Native Home,...and, if they do not comply with their desires or orders in hunting, etc., they by way of punishment half hang them, cut their heads with Clubs in a Shocking Manner, or flog them most unmercifully with Cats made of Kangaroo Sinews; several of them have from two to six women, who they claim as their own private property in this Manner...⁶⁵

The Bass Strait sealers ranged over a great distance in their quest for seals and Aboriginal women. In 1827, Major Lockyer of the 57th Regiment was sent to King George Sound, Western Australia on board the *Amity* with instructions to form a settlement. The expedition reached King George Sound on Christmas day, only to find four Aboriginal men, one badly injured, abandoned to die by sealers on Michaelmas Island. After returning the Aborigines to the adjacent mainland from where they were abducted, Lockyer made further investigations. William Hook, a former sailor from the *Governor Brisbane* who had joined the sealers, made a full statement to Lockyer claiming that he had only participated with the other sealers

⁶⁴ West, John, *op.cit.*, p.626 n.35

⁶⁵ Stewart to Campbell, HRA, Series III, Volume II. Canberra, The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament. 1921. pp. 575 - 576

under duress. Hook's confession is instructive, as it provides some insight into the tactics employed by sealers in the kidnapping of Aboriginal women. Hook related that not long after they (the sealers) had established huts at King George Sound, they received frequent visits from the natives who were friendly. As no Aboriginal women were permitted to visit the camp, the sealers attempted to gain the natives confidence by taking them out in their boats on fishing trips. One day, five natives asked to be taken out to Green Island to catch some birds. John Randall and James Everett⁶⁶ ordered the boats crew to abandon the natives once they had landed them on the island. Now that the Aboriginal men were out of the way, a party of sealers that included James Kirby⁶⁷ left the camp and returned after capturing four Aboriginal women. Hook recounted how two of the women managed to escape that night even though they were bound together.⁶⁸ The two women who remained in the sealers hands were soon rescued by Lockyer; one had been badly injured by Samuel Bailey who was subsequently arrested. Further searches discovered three more Aboriginal women with the sealers, two from Van Diemen's Land and one from Kangaroo Island, Lockyer ordered their repatriation to Sydney.⁶⁹

The plight of Aboriginal women captives in Bass Strait has also been well documented. The Quaker George Washington Walker noted on his tour of Van Diemen's Land in 1832 that:

⁶⁶ James Everitt was also active on Kangaroo Island, S.A, Woody Island and Gun Carriage Island he is known to have abducted Woreth.male.yer.pode.yer from Piper River and later to have murdered her because she did not clean mutton birds to his liking. see Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *op.cit.*, pp. 79-80

⁶⁷ James Kirby had an Aboriginal women taken from Van Diemen's Land in his possession at the time Dinah (Pier.rap.plen.er) see Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *op.cit.*, p.85

⁶⁸ Lockyer to Macleay. HRA, Series III, Volume II. Canberra, The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament. 1921. pp. 473 - 474

⁶⁹ Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *op.cit.*, p.44 The two Van Diemen's Land women were eventually sent to Launceston in 1827 on the cutter *Governor Arthur*.

I have before had occasion to notice that many of the native women are in the possession of sealers. Some have been forcibly carried off, it is believed, without reference to their inclinations, and sometimes accompanied by circumstances of extreme cruelty towards the men who were their natural associates and rightful owners.⁷⁰

On the same expedition Walker related the following contact with an Aboriginal woman living with the sealers:

At three o'clock, a.m. the cutter [*Charlotte*] anchored in the East Bay of Circular Head. A boat came alongside to inform those concerned, that G.A. Robinson was there. The crew, two of whom were sailors, came on board, leaving a Sydney Black and an aboriginal female of this island, in the boat. This female lived with a sealer named Kelly,⁷¹ who had also another woman of the same description, by whom he had one child [Maria - Port.rip.el.lan.er - from Pipers River]. We were struck with the gloomy expression of the woman in the boat, so different from that of the Aborigines we had on board. Jumbo [Bull.rer - also Louisa - Cape Portland/Swansea tribe] spoke to her, but she showed no disposition to converse, though they were of the same tribe. She was invited on board, to partake of some soup. Before she returned to the boat, W.J. Darling sent for her into the cabin, and asked her, if she would like to go to the settlement on Flinders, to which she answered, No. He reminded her that he had the power to take her from Kelly, if she chose to join her countrymen, and he said the sealers should not hurt her. Upon this declaration the countenance of the poor creature underwent a surprising change. She acknowledged that she would like to go, and that fear had induced her to express a contrary desire. Being asked why she should not converse with Jumbo, she said she durst not, having been strictly forbidden to do so by the sealers. Inquiry was made if the sealers beat her, to which she answered, Yes, plenty. With a stick? No, with a rope. From this moment, this woman, whom the sealers name Jackey, laughed and talked as gaily as the rest of her nation.⁷²

⁷⁰ Backhouse, James and Taylor, Charles. *op.cit.*, p. 108

⁷¹ This was an ex-convict sealer David/John Kelly who lived on Hunters and Robbins Islands until 1832 when he moved to the Furneaux Islands. He was known to have shot and wounded Mannelargenna, he also abducted a young girl Nol.la.hal.la.ker (Little Kit) from Robbins Island.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 116 - 117.

The main source of information supporting the notion of women being obtained by barter would appear to be derived from the sealers themselves, their main advocate being James Kelly.⁷³ It is unlikely that when questioned as to the origin of their women, sealers were going to volunteer information that they had willfully murdered Aborigines in order to steal them. Kelly, therefore is a poor choice as an impartial witness due to his own close personal and professional involvement with both sealers and the sealing trade from as early as 1804. In the oft quoted account of his circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1815, Kelly relates a conversation between the sealer George Briggs⁷⁴ and Lamanbunganah (Mannalargenna), in which Lamanbunganah asked Briggs for military support in a local dispute. On Briggs's refusal Lamanbunganah revealed: "...in a very hostile tone that he had often before gone with him to fight other tribes when he (Briggs) wanted women..."⁷⁵ Almost immediately after describing this conversation, Kelly, as if to excuse the sealer, notes that Briggs used to purchase his wives from the Cape Portland Aborigines - a statement that was patently false. Briggs had two Aboriginal women, one Ware.mo.deen.ner (Pung) was abducted by Briggs and then sold to John Thomas for a guinea after bearing him three children. The other woman, Mee.tone.yer.nan.ner (Dumpe) whom he also abducted, later ended up living with another sealer by the name of Thomas Tucker.⁷⁶

Robinson's journal has also been used as a source for confirming the existence of a trade in women, on this occasion in exchange for dogs. Anne McMahon argues that "dogs were prized by native tribesmen because of their usefulness in hunting kangaroo

⁷³ Ryan, Lyndall, *op.cit.*, p.69

⁷⁴ George Briggs was one of Kelly's companions and crewmen during the circumnavigation.

⁷⁵ Kelly, James. *op.cit.*, p.26

⁷⁶ Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *op.cit.*, pp.74 - 104

and they often stole them from the sealers or bartered them for women".⁷⁷ An extract from Robinson's journal was then directly quoted in order to substantiate this statement: "...many instances have been of their purchasing a woman for a dog". The full sentence from Robinson's journal states "The natives have stolen them [dogs] when the boats have come on shore, and *many instances have been of their purchasing a woman for a dog*".⁷⁸ By omitting the beginning of Robinson's sentence McMahon's 'their' refers to sealers but in the full sentence 'their' would appear to refer to the natives. The sentence is ambiguous, and although it may be interpreted as indicating sealers purchased women for dogs it doesn't say that. The sentence could equally be interpreted as meaning that in the light of the shortage of women (due to them being stolen by sealers) prized possessions such as dogs could be stolen from sealer's boats by natives and traded or used as some form of dowry to obtain replacement women from other tribes. The latter interpretation would be more in keeping with Robinson's very public position that the sealers' had obtained their women by force, a position made clear by one of the Notices he had nailed to trees on Gun Carriage Island.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ McMahon, Anne. *op.cit.*, p.45

⁷⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p. 272

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.452

NOTICE

To all concerned

All persons residing upon or resorting to any of the islands in Bass's or Banks Straits and having aboriginal females in their possession I hereby charge and require in the name of His Majesty's Colonial Government to deliver up all such women to me accordingly that they may be placed by me under the care of the Government at the Establishment.

And I further notify to all such persons that the act of carrying off or detaining those unhappy people is a flagrant offence for which the parties guilty of it are punishable by law.

If after this notice the women are not immediately delivered up but still detained then in such cases warrants will be immediately issued for the apprehension of all such offending parties whom the Government is resolved to bring to exemplary punishment.

Dated this 17th
day of March 1831

G.A. Robinson
Superintendent of Aborigines

Other commentators at the time, such as Jorgenson, noted the Aborigines fondness for dogs but always advanced stealing as the primary means of procuring them,⁸⁰ making no reference to any trade or barter in women at all. Lieut-Governor Arthur, well briefed on the treatment meted out to Aborigines by many of those Europeans living on the periphery of colonial settlement, wrote on how relationships with the Natives were: "...daily aggravated, by every kind of injury committed against the defenceless Natives, by the stock keepers and sealers, with whom it was a constant practice to fire upon them whenever they approached, and to deprive them of their women whenever the opportunity offered".⁸¹ In 1820, while employed as Harbour Master at Hobart, Captain James Kelly gave evidence before Commissioner Bigge. In his submission Kelly once again made the claim that instances had occurred of sealers

⁸⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*. op.cit., p. 52

⁸¹ Shaw, A.G.L. *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of all correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and his Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the subject of the military operations lately carried on against the Aboriginal inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land*. Hobart. Tasmanian Historical Research Association. 1971. p.3

purchasing Aboriginal women from their husbands, this time "...in exchange for the carcasses of the seals after they had taken the skins off".⁸² As the Aborigines had a plentiful supply of seals available and access was provided via the hunting skills of their women, it would appear a very poor bargain on their part indeed. The sealers themselves relied upon and used Aboriginal women's expertise in hunting seals as recognised by Kelly himself:

The women all walked into the water in couples and swam to three rocks about fifty yards from the shore. There were about nine or ten seals upon each rock laying apparently asleep. Two women went to each rock with their clubs in hand, crept closely up to a seal each and lay down with their clubs alongside. Some of the seals lifted their heads up to inspect their new visitors and smell them. The seals scratched themselves and lay down again. They scratch themselves with their fin or flipper. The women went through the same motions as the seal, holding up their left elbow and scratching themselves with their left hand, taking and keeping the club firm in their right ready for the attack. The seals seemed very cautious, now and then lifting up heads and looking round, scratching themselves as before and lying down again; the women still imitating every movement as nearly as possible. After they had lain upon the rocks for nearly an hour, the sea occasionally washing over them - as they were quite naked we could not tell the meaning of their remaining so long - all of a sudden the women rose up on their seats, their clubs lifted up at arm's length. Each struck a seal on the nose and killed him. In an instant they all jumped up as if by magic and killed one more each.⁸³

The particular exercise described above ended quite profitably for Kelly, yielding some 122 seal skins, which along with some kangaroo skins brought him the considerable sum of £180.⁸⁴ The relationship between the sealers and Aborigines in this instance was simply one of commerce. In return for kangaroo skins, Briggs provided the Aborigines the use of his boat to enable their women to hunt for

⁸² Fowler, R.M. *op.cit.*, p.184

⁸³ Kelly, James. *op.cit.*, pp. 30-31

⁸⁴ Rae Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*, Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. 1981. p.54

otherwise unobtainable seals on some small offshore islands. The tribe gained the seal carcasses for food and Briggs retained the skins. It is interesting to note that while the Aboriginal women were employed on the islands they maintained contact with, and remained under the control of their tribe by the use of smoke signals. Plomley, whilst acknowledging that at times the relationship between the Sealers and Aboriginal women could be a complex one, was clear about the different positions of Robinson and Kelly:

Whether one accepts Robinson's view that the women were removed by force, or the statement of such a man as Captain James Kelly that they were obtained from the tribes by barter, there is no doubt that large numbers of women were involved in these activities.⁸⁵

It is also difficult to accept that Aborigines in the North and North East regions of Tasmania would continue to trade women on an ongoing basis over a period of many years for no visible return,⁸⁶ to a point where there were virtually no women left. Plomley pointed out that Robinson's review of the ages of the sealers' women in 1831 revealed that "...nearly all of them were in their early twenties or younger..."⁸⁷ Therefore, as the raids for women had started in 1810 at the latest, the raids must have been persistent and the survival prospects for these women extremely poor.⁸⁸ Although contact with Europeans followed a different pattern in the North West, after some initial contact with sealers the local tribes had to deal with, and come to terms with the permanent presence of the Van Diemen's Land Company and their shepherds. Despite this close contact with Europeans (who also possessed dogs)

⁸⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.966

⁸⁶ Once an initial pair of dogs were obtained, a pack could soon be bred.

⁸⁷ Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *op.cit.*, pp. 54-55

⁸⁸ If the trade in women was initiated to appease and establish links of obligation with a powerful neighbour as proposed by Lyndall Ryan. *op.cit.*, p.67, the sealers behaviour, the mobility of the sealers which removed many women to other distant sealing grounds, as well as the high mortality rates experienced by the women would have quickly proved this to be a poor strategy and a futile hope for the Aborigines.

there is no record of any behaviour in the North West region that remotely approximates that claimed for the Aborigines in the North East. As late as 1832, Robinson's records of the remnants of the North West tribes show a relatively normal balance of males to females.⁸⁹

Date	Place/Tribe	Men	Women	Children inc. Adolescents
15 July 1832	Hunter Island	6	5	7
3-4 Sept, 1832	Arthur River/ Tarkiner	10	14	12

The names of the Aboriginal women present in these groups also reveal, that far from exploiting women as objects of trade or instruments of diplomacy, there was a practice of offering protection to vulnerable women, including those from different tribes. Two of the women listed by Robinson as taking refuge with the Tarkiners were Narucker, a widowed Peerapper woman with her daughter, and Lawerick, a Parperloihener woman whose husband Pendowtewer was in exile on Flinders Island.⁹⁰ The only record in the North West that connects Aboriginal women with the Aborigines desire for dogs was a case that involved the women stealing them. On the 31 January 1828, John Wedge a government surveyor was sailing along the North coast en route to survey the North West region for the VDL Co grant. Three Aboriginal women hailed his boat then waded out and asked to be taken aboard. The women, who spoke a little English acted as guides and befriended Wedge's men, as well as turns out, their dogs, until they reached Circular Head. During the night of the 20 February, the women absconded while the survey team slept taking four kangaroo

⁸⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*. op.cit., pp. 702-703

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.648

dogs with them. Wedge and his men gave chase in the morning, but gave up after reaching Rocky Cape.⁹¹

Despite the lack of hard evidence or supportive corroboration from contemporary observers, the notion that Aborigines used their women as items of barter continues to hold prominence. A recent report published by the Tasmanian Parliamentary Library Research Service boldly states:

Arrangements were made on a regular basis for sealers to take women either for the duration of an entire sealing season or for specific tasks. The Aboriginal band making such arrangements would provide women from their own group or abduct them from other bands and exchange them for commodities such as dogs, mutton-birds or flour.⁹²

The behaviour, or strategies adopted by Mannalargenna⁹³ in his dealings with sealers as reported by Kelly, even if entirely accurate, is hardly the basis from which to conclude that all Aborigines and all the tribes in Van Diemen's Land behaved in exactly the same way. This Eurocentric stereotyping of Aboriginal society and individuals, now commonplace in Tasmania, is blind to the cultural diversity inherent in the traditional tribal system, and in this particular case, it marginalises their humanity by ignoring the well documented existence of the strong and affectionate bonds that were a feature of Aboriginal family life.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Wedge, John Helder. *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824 - 1835. op.cit.*, pp. 42 - 43

⁹² Fuescu, Marina. *Aboriginality in Tasmania*. Hobart. Tasmanian Parliamentary Library Parliamentary Research Service. Issue Brief. 2000/3. September. 2000. p.50. See also Lyndall Ryan. *op.cit.*, p.67

⁹³ A chieftain from the North East region.

⁹⁴ see Robinson's observations in Plomley.N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, pp. 191-192 and Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?* Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. 1981. p.77

For those tribes in the North West region, the year 1825 heralded the end of the sealer's dominance of their coastal lands, but this was only to make way for greater forces, intent on territorial dispossession. The reports and charts prepared by the succession of explorers sent into the region to evaluate the possibilities for commercial exploitation and settlement were now about to bear fruit. The British Government, giving no consideration to the land rights or even existence of the native population, entered into an arrangement that would lead to the permanent settlement of their lands. In London a private enterprise called the Van Diemen's Land Company was formally established with a grant from the Colonial Secretary, Earl Bathurst of 250,000⁹⁵ acres of land to be located in the North West region of Van Diemen's Land.⁹⁶

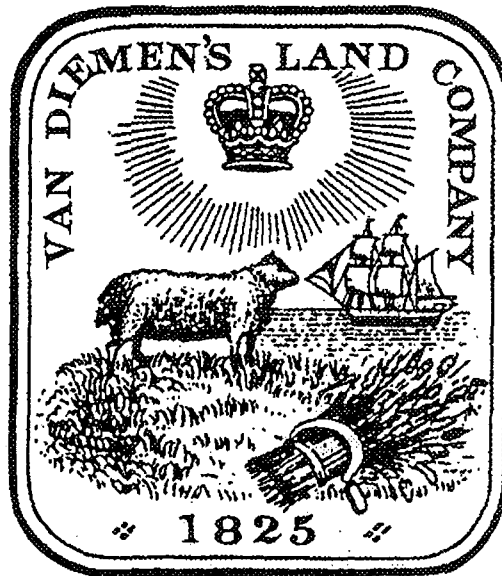
⁹⁵ The initial grant of land of 250,000 acres in one block was later increased to 350,000 acres in several blocks.

⁹⁶ Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.187

Chapter Three

Van Diemen's Land Company

Dispossession



On the 12 May 1824, eleven men¹ closely associated with the English woollen industry held a meeting in London to discuss the foundation of a joint stock company with a view to produce Merino and Saxon sheep on a large scale.² The incentive to form the Company, the future Van Diemen's Land Company, grew out of the high domestic demand for a dwindling supply of wool. English sheep flocks had progressively been bred to supply the local demand for meat at the expense of wool quality. As Alexander Williams noted "...so long as Englishmen are fond of fat mutton they must not expect to grow fine wool..."³ As a consequence, the English woolen industry became increasingly reliant on the importation of large quantities of

¹ Attwood, Matthias. Bischoff, James. Bond, Joseph. Cripps, Joseph. Everett, W.M.. Hughes, Henry. Jacob, John. Maitland, John. Pearse, John. Phillips, Edward. Saunders, John.

² Meston, A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842*. Launceston. The Museum Committee Launceston City Council. 1958. p.11

³ *ibid.*, p.9

Merino wool from Spain, and Saxon wool from Germany in an effort to meet the popular demand for fine wool products.⁴ The formation of new entrepreneurial companies was also encouraged by Commissioner Bigge, who, after a visit to New South Wales between 1819 and 1821, recommended that specific areas of land in the colony be granted to these enterprises calculated on the number of convicts employed and numbers of livestock owned.⁵ The option to take up Bigge's recommendation led to the formation of the Australian Agricultural Company (AACo) in April 1824. Headed by the influential MacArthur family,⁶ the AACo was not only granted one million acres in New South Wales but also gained an undertaking that no potential competitor in the form of an incorporated or joint stock company could be set up in New South Wales for twenty years.⁷ The relative power and influence of the AACo may be appreciated when one considers that in the same year the AACo was incorporated with a capital of £1,000,000, the Parliamentary Returns for the Colony of New South Wales reported a total annual expenditure of £450,000, a figure that included the transport of convicts.⁸ Excluded from New South Wales by the terms of the AACo grant, the promoters of the VDL Co held extensive talks with John Ingle, a ship owner and merchant who had earned a considerable fortune during his fifteen years in Van Diemen's Land. Encouraged by these discussions, the promoters applied to the Colonial Secretary Earl Bathurst for 500,000 acres of land in Van Diemen's Land under similar terms to those granted to the AACo.⁹ However, the

⁴ *ibid.*, p.10

⁵ Stokes, H.W.J. *The Settlement and Development of the Van Diemen's Land Company Grants in Van Diemen's Land 1824 - 1862*. BA (Hons) Thesis. University of Tasmania. 1964. p.4

⁶ The *Australian* described the control of the Australian Agricultural Company as a case of "...my son, my son-in-law, or my nephew's brother-in-law...so snug a corner in which to form family contacts". Clark, Manning. *A History of Australia. Volume II*. Carlton. Melbourne University Press. 1987. pp. 63-64

⁷ Stokes, H.W.J. *op.cit.*, p.5

⁸ Gregson, Jesse. *The Australian Agricultural Company*. Sydney. Angus and Robertson. 1907. pp. 2-3

⁹ Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842*. *op.cit.*, p.11

Colonial Secretary Earl Bathurst ignored the request as he had grave doubts that Van Diemen's Land held sufficient unsettled land to satisfy both the needs of free settlers and the VDL Co proponents. Bathurst was of the opinion that these large joint stock companies should be located in remote areas where their activities were unlikely to cause any disruption to existing settlers.¹⁰ In the meantime, the Colonial Office took the opportunity to arrange for the VDL Co promoters to meet with Colonel William Sorell the former Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land who had recently arrived in London. The meeting with Sorell was hardly encouraging with the retired Lieutenant Governor advising that almost all the good land in Van Diemen's Land had already been allocated. Sorell also had a poor opinion of the unsettled districts in the North East, but did admit to having little knowledge concerning the lands of the North West.¹¹ At this point in their deliberations, the proponents were made aware of a recently published book by Edward Curr entitled *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally designed for the use of Emigrants*. The author, who was known to Sorell had also recently returned from Van Diemen's Land and wrote the book during the voyage home.

Edward Curr (1798-1850) was born in Sheffield England, the son of a civil engineer. In 1817 he married Elizabeth Micklethwait and through her acquired a considerable sum of money. Shortly after the marriage, Curr entered into a partnership with John Raine a London merchant who had business interests in Hobart. In 1820, Curr accompanied by his wife set out to join Raine and start a new life in Van Diemen's Land.¹² Curr soon fell out with Raine accusing him of being too sharp in business and

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.12

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.13

¹² Shaw, A.G.L. and Clark, C.M.H. (eds.) *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Vol.1. 1788 - 1850*. Carlton. Melbourne University Press. 1983. p.269

formed a new partnership with Horatio William Mason¹³ a Hobart innkeeper and merchant. Apart from tending to his business affairs, Curr took an active part in the public life of Hobart Town, he played a prominent role in the establishment of the Catholic Church and served in the Deputy Judge Advocate's Court on several committees of enquiry. However, his business dealings must have been less than satisfactory, for upon hearing of the death of his father in 1823, Curr immediately dissolved his partnership and returned to England with his wife and two children. On his arrival in London, Curr set about preparing his book for publication. He was proud of his work and confessed to a friend "I send it like the dove from the Ark and I wait anxiously to see if it returns with a green branch in its mouth".¹⁴

Curr's book rekindled the investors original enthusiasm for the project, in particular his announcement that Van Diemen's Land was blessed with:

...a salubrity of climate which no country can surpass, and which is found to be peculiarly favourable to the rearing of sheep. For their fleece, when improved and brought to perfection, the colonist is always sure to find a market at a remunerating price. In the flocks of Van Diemen's Land its true riches will always be found to consist.¹⁵

The investors would also have been encouraged by an observation that appeared to counter Sorell's pessimism regarding land availability:

...that person will be unfortunate indeed, who, in his choice of a grant of land, does not contrive to have more good soil on his farm than will be likely to be cultivated for some generations to come.¹⁶

¹³ Desailly, Bronwyn. *The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824 - 1836*. M.A.Thesis. University of Tasmania. 1977. p.183

¹⁴ Shaw. A.G.L. and Clark. C.M.H. (eds.) *op.cit.*, p.270

¹⁵ Curr, Edward. *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally designed for the use of Emigrants*. 1824. Platypus Publications. Hobart. 1967. p.65

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.3

Curr made favourable comment on the general conditions in the north of the Island, noting that "...it is possessed of a moderately warm and very salubrious climate, more especially in the northern part, which, for an English constitution, can hardly be surpassed by any country in the world".¹⁷ Curr's opinions were all the more plausible to his London readers as they confirmed those of James Dixon,¹⁸ Captain of the ship *Skelton*, who reported that: "...The country is peculiarly adapted for sheep...and that animal thrives well and increases astonishingly...Taking its climate into consideration, it is much superior to Australia where the burning heats in summer dry up everything...".¹⁹ With the assistance of Sorell, the directors soon organised a conference with Curr to discuss the feasibility of large scale wool production in Van Diemen's Land and to gain further information on current conditions in the Colony. The meeting with Curr went well, his enthusiasm for the proposed venture, coupled with his unique knowledge of the Colony encouraged the promoters to appoint him as temporary secretary to the proposed Company.

Curr's 'dove' had found its mark, with his book producing results that exceeded all his expectations, but the future Directors for their part, should have read it more closely. Although Curr had travelled throughout the settled districts of Van Diemen's Land, it was obvious that he had no first hand knowledge of the North West region where the Company would eventually be located.²⁰ There was also no indication in his book that Curr possessed any practical experience in farming.²¹ Throughout the short treatise, Curr revealed himself to be a man who had serious difficulties relating to his

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.3

¹⁸ West, John. *op.cit.*, p.90

¹⁹ Meston, A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.11

²⁰ Bruce, Leslie. J. *A Gentleman from Silesia Adolphus Schayer and the Van Diemen's Land Company 1830 - 1843*. Research Paper. Tasmanian State Institute of Technology. 1990. pp 58-59

²¹ Curr did spend a brief period managing a property granted to him by Sorell, at Kempton just north of Hobart.

fellow colonists. Curr's elitist, and at times arrogant opinions, should have brought into question his suitability to manage a large Company workforce located in a remote area and under difficult circumstances. Curr was highly distrustful of poor farmers, convicts and servants alike:

Let the settler beware how he places himself amongst these people, for they are in general as poor and as flagitious as idleness, encouraged by the almost spontaneous fertility of their lands, can make them. Woe to the fat wethers and even to the pregnant ewes of their more wealthy neighbours! None of these depredators will want meat while there is a flock of sheep within a convenient distance; and few of them will want rum while those who sell it encourage their depredations.²²

On the subject of convicts, Curr warned of the "moral evil" occasioned by their large numbers,²³ while his advice regarding servants was to be aware of the "stern realities" of "...seditious, unruly, unwilling servants".²⁴ Curr's comments on labour are particularly revealing, delivered with a strength of conviction that suggests he was speaking from some personal experience:

And how is the work of the farm carried on? The labourer is a slave, with no motive to impel him but fear; his maintenance must be provided let him work or not. He is therefore idle and discontented, nay worse, he is contumacious and insolent. If the master be easy, the man is easier still; if he be generous, his good nature is imposed upon; if he be strict, there are a thousand ways of retaliation; his ploughs are broken, his sheep lost, his working oxen are sure to be missing or lame when required for the most important services. Should it unfortunately happen that, from the difficulty of providing meat or flour in remote situations, or, as is more frequent, from the wasteful extravagance of the men, they should be a day upon short allowance, they go down in a body to Hobart Town to make their complaint of being starved. In a word, the men

²² Curr, Edward. *op.cit.*, p.35

²³ Desailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.184

²⁴ Curr, Edward., *op.cit.*, p.viii

are fed, and clothed, and provided for, while their master is a prey to care and perplexity.²⁵

Curr's book also depicts a man ill at ease away from the settled districts with little empathy for the native bush: "There is no pleasing scope for the eye; if our feet be on ground that man has marked with his industry, the next step is a wilderness. Here indeed is the habitation of man; but the surrounding solitude is the abode of the beast of the forest".²⁶

Another noteworthy feature of Curr's advice to potential emigrants, is his failure to make any mention of the Aboriginal inhabitants. At the time of Curr's departure from Van Diemen's Land many of the tribes were still intact and still in possession of their traditional lands. Curr was most probably of the view that dispossession was a *fait accompli*, and that any Aboriginal resistance to settlement would be the responsibility of Colonial authorities and no concern of emigrants. In any event, the fact that the lands the proponents sought were currently occupied by Aboriginal tribes who still thought of themselves as the rightful owners was never raised as a matter for consideration in the subsequent grant negotiations.

Shortly after the appointment of Curr as temporary secretary, Pearce approached Wilmot Horton of the Department of Secretary of State for the Colonies, seeking to review the previous application for a land grant. Encouraged by Curr's advice as to the suitability and availability of land, Pearce sought to ease Bathurst's concerns regarding the possible negative impact of such a large venture on the small settler population. It was with this view in mind that Pearce presented Horton with the confident prediction: "...that an infinitely greater quantity of land than is wanted will be easily found adapted for our purpose, distinct and wide from the present located

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.120

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 119-120

lands".²⁷ Curr, in his new capacity as secretary, underpinned Pearse's assurances by writing to Bathurst personally, stating:

The primary object of the Company is the growth of fine wool for which the soil and climate of Van Diemen's Land are found to hold out ample encouragement, and the improvement of some considerable portion of the waste and uninhabited lands in the island.²⁸

Curr and Pearse obviously hoped that their declaration of a willingness to locate the business in a remote part of the Colony would influence Bathurst sufficiently to favour their request. Curr even went so far as to assure Bathurst that they would accept a grant of land "...to be located...in such quantities and districts as may be deemed advisable by the authorities in the island".²⁹ On receipt of these renewed applications, Bathurst sought the advice of Sorell who suggested that "under the imperfect information" available to him, the North West region was best suited for the desired grant "...the tract of country between Port Sorell and Cape Grim bounded on the north by the Ocean, and on the east and south by two lines drawn from either shores...".³⁰ Sorrel was unaware that during his absence from the Colony, Port Sorell had become a settled district with Captain Malcolm Laing Smith taking up a 2,000 acre grant.³¹ Bathurst, probably erring on the side of caution through his desire to keep the venture well away from established settlers, made no mention of Port Sorell

²⁷ Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p13

²⁸ Zeeman, Daniel. *The interpretations given by Edward Curr, Chief Agent of the Van Diemen's Land Company, and Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur, Governor of Van Diemen's Land, of the original land grant to the Van Diemen's Land Company, and the accuracy of these interpretations.* Research Paper. Tasmanian State Institute of Technology. 1991. p.3

²⁹ *ibid.*, p5

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.5

³¹ *ibid.*, p.6

in his letter of consent and limited the grant to 250,000 acres rather than the 500,000 originally requested.³²

The Company will receive their grant in the North-West district of the Island, that district being for the present purpose considered as bounded on the North by Bass's Streights [*sic*], on the West by the Ocean, and on the east and South by lines drawn from either shore so as to afford the necessary depth of Country. Within that district they will be at liberty to select any ungranted Lands at their own discretion, those lands must, however, be in one continuous and unbroken tract approximation to the form of a Square, as nearly as may be compatible with preserving a clear and well defined natural boundary. The whole quantity of useful land, that is of land capable of being used in pasturage or tillage, to be contained in this square is 250,000 acres; whatever useless and unprofitable land may be unavoidably included in order to complete the square figure will be granted to the Company gratuitously.³³

The company subsequently received its' Royal Charter from King George IV on 10 November 1825. After approving the grant, Bathurst promptly wrote to Colonel George Arthur the new governor in Van Diemen's Land to notify him of his decision and to explain the reasons for locating the Company in the North West:

I am not prepared to authorise the Company to make selections in other Districts more adjacent to the cultivated parts of the Island, which may be presumed to be of more value than the remote quarter to which I have confined them.³⁴

Arthur was further instructed that he was to arrange for convicts to be assigned to the Company on their arrival in the Colony and to grant land on the Bass Strait islands if there were not enough suitable for the Company's purpose on the mainland.³⁵ Alarmed by the establishment of a potential rival, the AACo sought to obtain an injunction to prevent the VDL Co from purchasing sheep in the European market for a period of

³² Meston, A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.14

³³ *ibid.*, p.16

³⁴ Zeeman, Daniel. *op.cit.*, pp. 9 - 10

³⁵ Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.186

five to six years.³⁶ The AACo advanced the argument that two major buyers on the continent would prohibitively force up the price of sheep. The VDL Co countered, that as the European sheep population was in the order of one hundred million, the few thousand to be purchased by both companies would have a negligible effect on overall prices. Eventually, after a great deal of argument, Bathurst had to intervene with the compromise solution that for a period of three years, the markets of Portugal and Spain be allocated to the VDL Co while Germany be assigned to the AACo.³⁷

With all arrangements in London now completed, the advance party³⁸ of the VDL Co set sail from Cowes in the *Cape Packet* on 12 October, 1825. Curr and Stephen Adey, the recently appointed Superintendent of the Company's Land Grant, were accompanied by their families on the voyage, which, after 143 days at sea reached Hobart Town on 14 March, 1826.³⁹ Five months earlier, on 27 November 1825, the first contingent of the AACo had arrived in Sydney. Robert Dawson their chief agent had disembarked with 720 French and Saxon sheep, cattle, choice plants and servants en route to Port Stephens district, the site of his Company's grant.⁴⁰

Curr and his party were keen to leave Hobart immediately on arrival in order to select their lands in preparation for the imminent arrival of the first Company supply vessel. The London directors had purchased the brig *Tranmere* soon after receiving their Royal Charter, to convey the initial stores, livestock and labour necessary to establish the new venture. However, the party was delayed in Hobart for a month, being required as witnesses in a court case arising from a series of incidents that involved the

³⁶ Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.14

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.15

³⁸ Curr, Edward. Adey, Stephen. Goldie, Alexander (Agricultural Superintendent), Hellyer, Henry (Chief Architect and Surveyor) and Fossey, Joseph and Lorymer, Clement (Surveyors).

³⁹ Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.18

⁴⁰ Clark, Manning. *A History of Australia. Volume II. op.cit.*, p.64

Captain of the *Cape Packet* during the voyage. During his enforced stay in Hobart, Curr became aware that Arthur's view on where the Company's land should be located was very different from his own. During a conversation over dinner, Arthur advised Curr that he understood Cape Grim was to be the centre of his Company's operations.⁴¹ At this point, Curr tried to convince Arthur that the eastern border of the Company's grant should be Port Sorell, quoting Sorell's letter to Bathurst to support his case. In doing so, Curr was being devious, as Sorell's letter was only one of advice; the letter that counted was that of Bathurst's decision. Curr also neglected to inform Arthur of the personal instructions he had received from Bathurst on the 15 April 1825, outlining boundaries that made no mention of Port Sorell:

The Company will receive their grant in the north west district of the island, that district being for the present purpose considered as bounded on the north by Bass's Straights; on the west by the ocean; and on the east and south by lines drawn from either shore...⁴²

On the 12 April 1826, Curr's party finally set off for the north coast to select their land west of Port Sorell. On arrival at the Port, Curr discovered that the area was already settled, with Captain Malcolm Laing Smith in possession of 2,000 acres of land. Curr immediately rushed back to Hobart to demand the selection be disallowed, on the grounds that Bathurst had ordered the district be exclusively reserved for the Company's use. Arthur, mindful of his own instructions from Bathurst that clearly stated that the grant should be located in a "remote quarter" well away from settlers, referred the matter back to London. While Curr was engaged in fruitless debate with Arthur, his officers were busy exploring the North West coastline. Adey had rented the schooner *Ellen* and bought a whaleboat for the

⁴¹ Meston, A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.18

⁴² Zeeman, Daniel. *op.cit.*, p.9

expedition which set out from Georgetown on the 27 April 1826.⁴³ Aided by Richard Frederick, a guide who had an intimate knowledge of that part of the coast, the party slowly made its way towards Circular Head. Bearing in mind that Adey was looking specifically for sheep pastures, his advice to Curr was that the whole district from Port Sorell to Circular Head was practically worthless.

...so entirely wretched is the country in this neighbourhood that, were I to attempt to describe to you the dreary and desolate tract which extends along the coast, forty to fifty miles, as far as Rocky Cape, and thence to Circular Head, it would cost you more time to read than the whole place is worth.⁴⁴

However, Adey was impressed by what he saw on arriving at Circular Head, describing the "...change from a dreary and forbidding to a comparatively open and beautiful country, - from a bad to a good soil..." to be "...delightful..." to them all. Adey also approved of the harbour and anchorage, reported a plentiful supply of fresh water and estimated there were 2,000 acres of good land at Circular Head with the possibility of other suitable acreages towards Cape Grim. Accordingly, on 28 November 1826, Alexander Goldie and Joseph Fossey organised a small expedition⁴⁵ to examine the surrounding lands for additional pastures. Landing at Circular Head, Goldie and Fossey spent two days walking over the land and estimated that there were 4,000 acres of good pasture while a great deal more could be made available at moderate expense by clearing.⁴⁶ Sending the whale boat on ahead, the pair then set off on foot to explore the land towards Cape Grim. After a difficult journey, Cape

⁴³ Meston, A.L. *The Work of the Van Diemen's Land Company in Land Settlement*. Hobart. Report of the Hobart Meeting, 1928 of The Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. 1929. p.260

⁴⁴ Adey, Stephen. *Extracts of his Progress along the North Shore of Van Diemen's Land*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1826. p.11

⁴⁵ The party included assigned servant Alexander McKay, who was later to accompany Hellyer on his most difficult expeditions as well as play a prominent role in Robinson's Friendly Mission.

⁴⁶ Goldie, Alexander. *Report of Mr. Alexander Goldie of his Journey from George Town to Cape Grim and the Western Coast*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1826.p.5

Grim was found to be "...all good sheep country..." containing a large plain suitable for cattle.⁴⁷ Further exploration revealed smaller areas of pasture land at Mt. Cameron. Adey, after consulting with Goldie and Fossey on their return, advised Curr that the district contained approximately 50,000 to 70,000 acres of good land immediately available to the Company.⁴⁸ Curr could not fail to be impressed by these reports and was convinced that the Circular Head/Cape Grim region was eminently suitable for his Company's operations. After taking the decision to establish a base at Circular Head, Curr drafted a letter to Arthur advising him that he would accept his ruling regarding the location of his Company's grant, although under protest. Curr's decision was also influenced by his lack of progress in increasingly acrimonious negotiations with Arthur and by the imminent arrival of the *Tranmere* in the next few weeks with its cargo of precious livestock. It is an interesting point that neither Adey nor Goldie made any reference to Aboriginal contact in their reports to Curr, who had previously warned them to expect a strong Aboriginal presence. Although the Aborigines may have remained hidden from the surveyors, there would have been the usual signs of occupation such as huts, spent campfires and smoke. Their omission from the reports may be a testimony to the peaceful nature and lack of threat posed by the tribes in the North West. Curr, from local intelligence, knew that Aborigines occupied the land he was about to take up, as is evident in his Order of 22 March 1826, where he outlined the Company's position with regard to the original inhabitants. Although the order expresses no qualms about depriving the Aboriginal tribes of their lands - they have to make way for "civilisation", it does make clear that the Company desired it be done peacefully if possible:

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.6

⁴⁸ Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.21

It is impossible to conclude this order without adverting to the situation of the Aborigines who are known to exist in considerable numbers in the North West part of this island. It is too little to say that they are never to be molested unnecessarily, or injured, but in self defence. The dictates of common humanity will protect them so far, it should always be kept in view that in taking a large tract of country for the necessary purposes of civilisation the original possessors will be deprived in a great degree of their Hunting Grounds, their only support and thereby acquire a claim to such assistance and consideration as circumstances may enable the Company's servants to confer.⁴⁹

The Order concluded with a paragraph that reflected Curr's own interpretation of Company Policy, as well as his innate distrust of people generally, irrespective of origins:

...At the same time the well known character of the people must be kept in view and treachery must be guarded against. No person must suffer himself to be surprised by them at a disadvantage or without arms or to be seduced by any appearance of friendliness to trust himself in their power; the surest way to prevent bloodshed is to be always prepared to repel and punish aggression.⁵⁰

Curr's deep suspicion of the motives of his fellow beings, coupled with a natural arrogance, encouraged him to regard the use of violence as an effective and legitimate expedient when confronted with opposition or obstruction, whether from assigned servants or from Aborigines. Curr was definitely not the man to be entrusted with the task of negotiating a relationship with the Aborigines, particularly the model favoured by the directors in London which encouraged the close integration of the native population with the company's commercial activities.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Van Diemen's Land Company Orders. No. 4. 22 March 1826

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ See Outward Despatch No.64. Court to Curr. 1 August 1828, on page 119

There were others in the colony who also thought Curr to be ill suited to the position of responsibility he held within the VDL Co. The three land commissioners⁵² of Van Diemen's Land maintained a journal that sarcastically recorded Edward Curr as:

...receiving the rudiments of an education in a counting house in Liverpool ...fitting him for a legislator, came to Van Diemen's Land with a partner of great celebrity in the blackguard work, by name of John Raine, entered then into partnership with Mr Horatio William Mason (an innkeeper and merchant) and then returned to England and wrote a book cursing the colony, more than thirty miles of which he had never travelled, and took a farm he had never seen, having by these means acquired knowledge of Van Diemen's Land such as no man ever before possessed...The great Van Diemen's Land Company could not have done better than employ so able and so experienced a colonist to transact their immense undertakings at Cape Grim, and the Honourable Edward Curr set out with a large retinue for that far-famed Cape, and when he'd had proceeded about five miles beyond the limits of the known stock runs in that quarter, he shot a horse, which fell in a creek, and left him there as a kind of beacon to show future travellers how far the Van Diemen's Land company had explored.⁵³

The *Tranmere* finally arrived at Georgetown on 29 September 1826, and was redirected to the new anchorage at Circular Head. Unfortunately for the long suffering passengers, unusually rough seas delayed the vessel's arrival until 24 October. Adey took advantage of the delay to organise the construction of a jetty as well as some small cottages. The weather and damage to the vessel produced further delays in discharge, but eventually the stores and the livestock⁵⁴ were safely unloaded. The *Tranmere* also brought the first consignment of labour for the new enterprise, consisting of indentured servants considered to have skills necessary for the

⁵² Edward Dumaesq, Roderic O'Connor and Peter Murdoch.

⁵³ Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.197

⁵⁴ The initial livestock consisted of a valuable stallion from Yorkshire, 50 sheep from Gloucester as well as 2 bulls and 2 heifers. The Company's flocks were built up later by purchases from the Archer family near Longford and further imports of Merino sheep.

venture such as shepherds and ploughmen, as well as some much sought after tradesmen who were in short supply in the Colony. Indentured servants were recruited by the Company in London. They were signed on for an agreed period of time, often as much as seven years, with wages and conditions of employment for that period detailed in the contract. Curr also applied for, and received, 24 assigned servants (convicts) from the colonial authorities to further augment his workforce.⁵⁵ The right to assigned servants, which equated to a guaranteed supply of cheap labour, was part of the original agreement negotiated with Bathurst and an essential element of the Company's long term plans.⁵⁶ The Company had obtained their allocation of 250,000 acres at a comparatively low quit rent that was not payable until five years after the initial grant. However, providing the Van Diemen's Land authorities could supply sufficient convicts, the VDL Co undertook to employ at its own expense as many convicts as free labour, thereby saving the government £16 per year. If, after 15 years, it could be demonstrated that the VDL Co had saved the government £25,000, the estate would be entirely free of quit rent.⁵⁷ In short, the Company would appear to have gained all the ingredients considered essential for a successful colonial enterprise, abundant capital, a strong market, cheap labour and even cheaper land.

With the initial building program underway, Adey was able to leave the settlement to arrange for a delivery of flour from Launceston, Goldie taking charge in his absence. Not long after Adey's departure, conflict broke out between the indentured and assigned servants. Goldie, who had temporarily lost control of the situation, promptly panicked and sent an urgent request for military assistance. Arthur, with a

⁵⁵ Lennox, Geoff. *The Van Diemen's Land Company servants per Tranmere, 1826*. Hobart. Paper delivered to the Tasmanian Historical Research Association. 14 March 2000. p.3

⁵⁶ Duxbury, Jennifer. *Colonial Servitude: Indentured and Assigned Servants of the Van Diemen's Land Company 1825 - 41*. Clayton. Monash Publications in History:4. 1989. p.2

⁵⁷ Meston, A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.17

more realistic assessment of the potential for serious insurrection, decided to ignore Goldie's predicament.⁵⁸ Apparently, Goldie feeling a need to mark the Company's first Christmas day in the Colony, had issued a ration of spirits to both convicts and free men, but made the error of issuing more to the latter. The convicts resented this slight, and after stealing the rum of the indentured servants proceeded to get drunk. Almost inevitably, a brawl took place between the two groups with some of the inebriated convicts threatening revolt as well as offering personal insult to Goldie.⁵⁹ Calm was restored with the exhaustion of the spirits and by Goldie having the blacksmith make up a set of chains to fasten Harley, one of the ringleaders, to a tree. Curr, delayed in Hobart, was unable to reach the settlement until the 21 January 1827. Immediately on his arrival, Goldie presented him with complaints against two of the convicts and two of the indentured servants. For the servants of the VDL Co this was their first opportunity to discover their managing director's position on labour relations, Curr enlightened them by having the convicts flogged and the free men's wages stopped. Pleased with his handiwork Curr reported to his directors:

...I left the people, both bond and free in a state of discipline and subordination, which I have reason to believe is not surpassed, if equalled in any estate in the Island...⁶⁰

Curr's actions were entirely consistent with attitudes expressed in his earlier 'advice to emigrants' "...The labourer is a slave, with no motive to impel him but fear..."⁶¹ and again in his reference to the condition of indentured servants as that of "...seven years slavery..."⁶² The system of authority that allowed Curr to take such unilateral actions is worth examining, especially with regard to the indentured servants. The

⁵⁸ Lennox, Geoff. *The Van Diemen's Land Company servants per Tranmere, 1826. op.cit.*, p.4

⁵⁹ Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, p.53

⁶⁰ Inward Despatch No. 46. Curr to Directors. 1827

⁶¹ Curr, Edward. *op.cit.*, p.120

⁶² Inward Despatch 212, Curr to Court. 4th May 1832, cited in Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, p.4

VDL Co directors had earlier secured an arrangement with the authorities in London that effectively subsidised the labour costs of indentured servants. The scheme, similar to that applying to convict labour, gained the Company a discount on their quit rent of £16 for each male and £20 for each female servant employed. This agreement encouraged the use of indentured servants; although still more costly than assigned servants they were considerably cheaper than free labour. The scheme also granted VDL Co directors the additional benefits of hand selecting labour with desired skills from the unemployed reserves in England, while affording more avenues for regulation and control out in the Colony. The Company's main sources of control over their servants in Van Diemen's Land were derived from the extreme isolation of the settlement; the visiting Quaker James Backhouse observing:

The situation would afford seclusion equal to a penal settlement and with a small degree of precaution, escape would be extremely difficult. A man would be more at a loss to find his way in these forests if without a compass and out of sight of a road than a mariner in the midst of the Atlantic.⁶³

The advantage that geographic isolation conferred on the Company over indentured labour was augmented by an ability to invoke the legal sanctions available to their residential agents. The indentures under which the servants worked were enforceable by the provisions of the English master and servant legislation. The penalties a servant could incur for a breach of contract ranged from fines, stopping of wages and up to six months imprisonment. The servants' access to legal redress for wrongs or harm incurred on their part, were severely limited by lack of access to an independent judiciary. Servants with a grievance had to first approach their supervisor, who would forward on the complaint to the Chief Agent, who, after

⁶³ Comment by the visiting Quaker, James Backhouse, quoted in Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.57

consultation with the directors would make a ruling from which there was no avenue of appeal.⁶⁴ The servants recourse to justice was further hampered by the fact that Curr as residential agent also held the power of magistrate, a situation that continued up until 1832. Curr, commenting on his position noted "...the power which I exercise here is both master and magistrate, party and judge".⁶⁵ The workers who signed with the VDL Co to leave uncertain conditions in England, did so with new hopes, aspirations and a firm expectation that they would improve their lot both materially and socially. The Company, of course, had other ideas regarding the function of indentured labour, which created an environment replete with conflicts of interest. Curr complained to the directors that:

The free men all come here with the full belief and expectation that Van Diemen's Land is the true Eldorado, every ploughman expects to be an overseer, his family to be kept for nothing by the company. This all to lead to a very pleasant life...⁶⁶

On another occasion Curr was to liken the condition of indented labour as "...seven years slavery..."⁶⁷

Curr occupied a position of inordinate power that suited the popular title bestowed upon him, the "Potentate of the North".⁶⁸ As Chief Agent he had virtually unquestioned authority over his officers, indentured servants, assigned servants and, although they were unaware of the fact, the North West Aborigines. Curr had a unique opportunity as well as responsibility to shape a better future for not only his Company, but for many of those whose lot it was to fall under his jurisdiction and protection. Accordingly, Curr must accept a great measure of personal

⁶⁴ Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, p.45

⁶⁵ Inward Despatch No. 247. Curr to Court 22 March 1833, cited in Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, p.45.

⁶⁶ Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, pp. 18 - 19

⁶⁷ Inward Despatch No. 212. Curr to Court, 4 May 1832

⁶⁸ A title bestowed on Curr by James Ross of the *Hobart Town Courier* 16 January 1835

accountability for both the policies of his Company and the activities of its servants during his period in office.

Once established at Circular Head, Curr soon realised that the locally available pasture land was insufficient for his Company's long term plans. In an effort to recover the situation, Henry Hellyer and a small party were sent on an expedition to investigate the interior. Hellyer set off from Rocky Cape on 1 February 1827, with two horses and four companions⁶⁹ in the direction of Valentine's Peak. After six days' journey a point was reached where the bush was becoming too dense for the horses⁷⁰ and Wells and Higginson were too exhausted to continue. Even though there was abundant evidence of an Aboriginal presence in the area,⁷¹ Hellyer saw no danger in leaving the two men alone to care for the horses. On reaching the summit of Valentine's Peak, Hellyer looked to the south and believed he had found the very land Curr was looking for. Unfortunately, the grassy plains that he thought to be natural pasture⁷² were in fact man made, Aboriginal hunting grounds created and maintained by firestick farming. Hellyer described his discovery in glowing terms:

We alighted in the evening upon an open spot which had caught my observation from the top. I found it consisted of grassy hills and knolls, and resembled a neglected old park - a thousand or fifteen hundred acres in a patch without a tree... Grass run to seed, the tops of which appeared at this season nearly white...Here we saw kangaroos in abundance, and tracks of them in all directions.⁷³

⁶⁹ Issac Cutts, Richard Frederick, Wells and Higginson.

⁷⁰ An area now known as Dipwood Marsh.

⁷¹ Hellyer discovered Aboriginal Huts and remains of recent camp fires see Hellyer, Henry. *Report of Henry Hellyer dated Circular Head, 13 March, 1827*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1823. p.7

⁷² Later named the Surrey Hills

⁷³ Hellyer, Henry. *op.cit.*, p.2

A day later Hellyer commented "...went over many considerable hills burnt by the natives, found a lot of native huts".⁷⁴ After much exhaustive investigation, Hellyer returned to the spot where he had left the horses some 19 days earlier, the men were unharmed and reported no contact with Aborigines at all.⁷⁵

Isolated by both language and distance the North West tribes probably had no knowledge of Aboriginal experiences of English incursions or of the Black War raging in other parts of the island.⁷⁶ Consequently, they were entirely peaceful, unaware of the motives of their new white visitors. Hellyer expressed no anxiety in leaving two exhausted men alone for nearly three weeks in their midst, and Curr reported to his directors that the Cape Grim Natives, while numerous, were "...in no way connected with the tribe which has caused so much bloodshed in the Island during the last few months".⁷⁷ Greatly encouraged by Hellyer's report, Curr thought it prudent to wait a little longer and make a thorough examination of the district before making any final decisions regarding the situation of the Company's grant. Accordingly, the surveyor Clement Lorymer and an assigned servant, Jorgen Jorgenson, who had some bush experience, were sent to find a route from the Pieman River to Hellyer's newly discovered pastures, now called the Surrey and Hampshire Hills. The pair set off on 1 March 1827. After travelling overland via Mt. Cameron, they arrived at West

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.3

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.6

⁷⁶ In a later period when the war had spread to involve the northern tribes whose language was known to the north west people, traditional tribal differences prevented any collaboration against a common enemy despite attempts to forge such an alliance. Robinson recorded a member of the Punniler.anner tribe from Port Sorell telling him of such overtures:

"Albert said the Port Sorell natives frequently travelled to Circular Head, Cape Grim and Mount Cameron and fought with the wild natives. Said their object in going to their country was not for hostile purposes but to make friends with them and to induce them to visit their country and to aid them in robbing and committing aggressions upon the whites, but the wild or West Point natives would not make friends but fought with them. Several were killed on those occasions on both sides. One of the West Point natives was killed in the sea where he had fled for shelter. The west coast natives never visited the Port Sorell country".

see Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.512

⁷⁷ Inward Despatch No.42. Curr to Directors. 13 February 1827. AOT VDL 5/1

Point and met up with a whale boat sent to support them. They then continued on to the Arthur River region and then down the coast to a point just north of the Pieman River. During the journey, Jorgenson exhibited considerable interest in the Aborigines he encountered, making detailed notes of his observations. Lorymer also made personal contact with Aborigines near Sandy Cape:

...who treated him and the party in the most friendly manner. An old woman seemed to have great authority amongst them. They deposited their spears at a distance as our party did their firearms. Four or five young women appeared well pleased and jocular tho' their attitudes might not be considered of the most decent description to white people. The party of natives consisted of about 20, of whom some children. All parted on the best of terms.⁷⁸

Jorgenson's report confirmed the peaceful disposition of the Aborigines, blissfully unaware that their lands were now forfeit to the VDL Co: "The natives..." he wrote "...seem an inoffensive and friendly race. Frank and generous treatment may render them of some service to white men who should visit this quarter".⁷⁹ Lorymer and Jorgenson's attempt to find a route to the Surrey Hills was soon to end in failure and tragedy; fifteen miles inland from the coast, after finding the bush to be impenetrable, they were forced to turn back. On the return journey to Circular Head, Lorymer was drowned while attempting to cross the Duck River on the 6 April.⁸⁰ Although the expedition to find a west coast route failed, Curr decided that he still had no other option but to take up the Hampshire and Surrey Hills acreages. A strong recommendation was sent to the directors advising that if the Company's grant could not be extended to include these new grounds as well as those already claimed at Cape Grim, the latter should be abandoned.⁸¹ Curr then immediately set about establishing

⁷⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. (ed.) *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land. op.cit.*, p.9

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.9

⁸⁰ Meston.A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.40

⁸¹ Inward Despatch No.54. Curr to Directors. 17 April 1827 cited by Stokes, H.W.J. *op.cit.*, p.12

a stock and supply route, to link the Hampshire and Surrey Hills with Circular Head and the settled districts to the east. Fossey was sent with a small party to construct a stock route from the Western Marshes⁸² to the Surrey Hills, while Hellyer, after selecting Emu Bay as the most suitable port and starting point, commenced work on a road directly south to the Hampshire Hills. When Fossey's party arrived in the Surrey Hills region in May, Fossey echoed Hellyer's enthusiasm for the countryside, writing:

...I came upon another part of the Surrey Hills, through which the Leven winds its course to the northward...The country in the vicinity of this river is so admirably laid out by nature, that it assumes very much the appearance of a nobleman's domain, - both as to extent and good quality, - particularly that part lying to the east of the river.⁸³

The lands in which Fossey was travelling included the summer hunting grounds of both the North and North Western Aboriginal tribes, as well as important ochre mines. Fossey noted their presence:

From the numerous huts that present themselves, I inferred it was a part of the country to which the natives frequently resort; and, on the heath,⁸⁴ I came so near them that I distinctly heard their call for the assembling of their forces.⁸⁵

Although Fossey's party was in effect trespassing, as they cut tracks through the bush and hunted Aboriginal game, his party, isolated and vulnerable, was allowed to pass untroubled and unharmed by the local tribes.⁸⁶ Hellyer's section of the road was completed in February 1828, with Fossey's stock route joining it on 23 June to

⁸² Located just south of present day Deloraine.

⁸³ Fossey, Joseph. *Report of Mr. Joseph Fossey, dated Circular Head, 26th May, 1827*. Hobart, Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1827. p.9

⁸⁴ Fossey is referring here to Hounslow Heath in the vicinity of the Middlesex Plains

⁸⁵ Fossey, Joseph. *op.cit.*, p.10

⁸⁶ The Pallit.torre and Noe.teller tribes of the North region.

complete the circuit. When Hellyer's road was sufficiently advanced, Curr took the opportunity to visit the area for the first time during October 1827. Curr was unimpressed by what he saw, the soil was poor, the grass coarse and wiry and the climate was cold.⁸⁷ Although Curr was of the opinion that the pasture could be improved by burning and grazing he was forced to conclude that the area, the Surrey Hills "...can never be a first nor even a second rate sheep pasture."⁸⁸ However, the Hampshire Hills held more promise for Curr who reported it to be suitable for sheep grazing if not heavily stocked.⁸⁹ In addition to holding the post of the VDLC's Chief Agent, Curr had also assumed Adey's role of Superintendent of Lands, a position that made him fully responsible for the decision to acquire the Hampshire and Surrey Hills lands. Although Hellyer was criticised for providing over optimistic and misleading reports, neither Hellyer, nor Fossey for that matter, were employed for their agricultural knowledge. Curr who knew full well that they had none, should have inspected the land in person, or at least sent Goldie, the Agricultural Superintendent, before making the claim. Arthur was also unhappy with the claim as he was still keen to keep the VDL Co operations well away from settled districts. Accordingly, after receiving instructions from Lord Bathurst, Arthur dispatched the Assistant Surveyor John Helder Wedge "...to survey, examine and report upon the North-west District of the Island, for the purpose of locating to the Van Diemen's Land company a grant of land..."⁹⁰ Arthur hoped that Wedge's report would assist in confining the VDLC's grant to that quarter.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Stokes, H.W.J. *op.cit.*, p.17

⁸⁸ Inward Despatch No. 70. Curr to Directors. 10 October 1827 cited by Stokes, H.W.J. *op.cit.*, p.17

⁸⁹ Meston, A.L. *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842. op.cit.*, p.28

⁹⁰ Wedge, John Helder. *Official Report of Journeys made by J.H. Wedge, Esq., Assistant Surveyor, in the North-west portion of Van Diemen's Land, in the early part of the Year 1828.* Hobart,

Wedge's initial survey took him to the junction of the Alarm and Detention Rivers. In January 1828, he reported that although the country was rough it contained about three to four thousand acres of land that would be suitable for light grazing after burning off and sowing introduced grasses.⁹² A second journey examined an area near the source of the Black River where he advised the soil of the forest floor to be friable, and of a quality suitable for agricultural purposes once cleared. Wedge's third expedition proceeded inland from the Duck River before turning west to join the coast near Mount Cameron. The coastal strip was then explored as far south as Mount Balfour, which Wedge climbed in order to observe the surrounding countryside.⁹³ As a result of these surveys, Wedge recommended that the VDLC's claim be located in the Cape Grim district with the grant extended to Mount Balfour in the south and the Alarm River in the east. This configuration would provide a square boundary enclosing nearly one million acres. Although Wedge reported that one hundred thousand acres would never be of any use, he was of the opinion that the heavily timbered areas, impractical for individual settlers to clear could be developed by the VDL Co into a valuable resource.⁹⁴ Wedge also claimed that his proposed grant would contain at least fifty thousand acres immediately fit for grazing without any need of preparation. The VDL Co Directors, preferring Hellyer's surveys, rejected Wedge's report out of hand, declaring that they would abandon their project in Van Diemen's Land entirely and cut their losses, rather than accept his

Tasmanian Legislative Council Library. 1828. p.1

⁹¹ Meston. A.L. *The Work of the Van Diemen's Land Company in Land Settlement. op.cit.*, p.271

⁹² Wedge, John Helder. *Official Report of Journeys made by J.H.Wedge, Esq., Assistant Surveyor, in the North-west portion of Van Diemen's Land, in the early part of the Year 1828. op.cit.*, p.1

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.4

⁹⁴ Meston. A.L. *The Work of the Van Diemen's Land Company in Land Settlement. op.cit.*, pp. 271

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recommendations.⁹⁵ Curr, in keeping with his character, went further and accused Wedge of being "...guilty of misrepresentation...".⁹⁶

Although Wedge's official report makes no mention of an Aboriginal presence in the area, his diary is more informative and relates one encounter where a boy was captured. On the 1 May 1828, Wedge recorded his party approaching West Point near Mount Cameron where they noticed a solitary Aboriginal standing motionless not wishing to attract their attention while he observed their progress. On seeing that he was discovered the Aborigine retreated behind a small sand dune. Wedge sent his men in pursuit, and on rounding the sand dune they came upon a party of sixteen Aborigines carrying spears.⁹⁷ One of Wedge's men panicked and fired a shot at the Aborigines, one was seen to spring in the air and fall before getting up and fleeing with the rest of his band. Wedge's men gave chase until one of the Aborigines was seen to separate from the group and run into the sea for sanctuary. Wedge's diary records what followed:

...Two or three of the men went to the beach to secure the one that was in the water, and when I joined them I found it was impossible to induce him [to] come out by making signals for that purpose - He remained swimming amidst the very heavy surf that was breaking upon the beach - no less to my astonishment than to my admiration - He at length was gradually washed on shore apparently lifeless - from the effect of cold - He was swimming more than half an hour - I restored him to life by friction - it was a boy about 9 or 10 years old - the rest of the natives disappeared & we saw them no more....⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.272

⁹⁶ Inward Despatch No. 98. Curr to Court. 23 October 1829. AOT VDL 5/2 LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 33/2, p.203

⁹⁷ A band from the Peerapper Tribe.

⁹⁸ Wedge, John Helder. *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824 - 1835. op.cit.*, p.48

However, the following day Wedge's party discovering fresh "...footmarks on the sand...", the Aborigines no doubt looking for an opportunity to rescue the young boy.⁹⁹ The presence of a child with the Aboriginal band suggests that Wedge's men had attacked a hunting expedition rather than a war party. Robert Drew,¹⁰⁰ one of the men who accompanied Wedge's survey team, gave a rather different account of the kidnapping of Tee.tore.ric in a conversation with George Robinson in June 1830:

He [Drew] first saw him [Tee.tore.ric] on the beach with the tribe and when they heard him and ran away, the boy run into the sea and continued there until he was completely exhausted and the sea washed him onshore. He picked him up and carried him to the fire and rubbed his loins and brought him to. Mr. Wedge then told him to come with him and he would give him clothes, but the boy treated his proposal with contempt and wished to go to his mother.¹⁰¹ During the time they was on that part of the coast they tied his hands. He cried very much and going up Mount Cameron he got his hands at liberty and run down the mountain, but was pursued by the men and brought back.¹⁰²

The next mention of Tee.tore.ric was two years later, when Wedge wrote "In August 1830 saw some natives in the penitentiary at Launceston, among whom was the brother¹⁰³ of the boy who has been living with me since I came from Cape Grim but who died abut ten days back".¹⁰⁴ Wedge used to refer to Tee.tore.ric as either May Day, from the day he was kidnapped, or as Whetee Coolera, possibly another tribal name, to most people he was simply known as 'Wedge's boy'. After Tee.tore.ric's death from 'inflammation of the chest', Wedge confided to John Leake, that "...he

⁹⁹ The boy's name was Tee.tore.ric

¹⁰⁰ Wedge's Diary refers to Drew as Robert Rew. *ibid.*, p.42

¹⁰¹ Tee.tore.ric's Mother was Koi.er.neep.

¹⁰² Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission op cit.*, p.182

¹⁰³ It is not clear who Wedge is referring to here, as Tee.tore.ric had three brothers: Nee.cam.mer.nic, Dry.der.er.wic and Par.lue.er.ic.

¹⁰⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.232, n.113

missed his young friend..." but he had "...three other native lads under his care..."¹⁰⁵

Why bachelor Wedge would go to such lengths to steal an Aboriginal boy from his family is unclear, and one can only speculate as to his reasons for keeping a number of young Aboriginal boys at his private dwelling.

It is easier to put forward reasons for the attack on the Peerapper tribesmen by Wedge's men; it was probably a result of their experiences in the Black War underway in the rest of the Colony. It is unlikely that Curr would have been aware of their actions against the Aborigines, even though they were close to his establishment at Circular Head. There was little direct communication between Wedge and the representatives of the VDL Co. Curr was suspicious of Arthur's motive for initiating the survey. Suspicions that could only have been confirmed when Wedge freely admitted that when questioned on the subject by Curr on board the *Caroline* he "...avoided the subject..."¹⁰⁶

While Wedge and his men were undermining any possibilities there may have been to establish friendly relations with the Aborigines on the west coast, the new possessors of the land, the erstwhile cowed servants of the VDL Co, having discovered their power over the powerless, were behaving in a similar manner at Cape Grim.

¹⁰⁵ West, John cited in Wedge, John Helder. *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824 - 1835. op.cit.*, p.xliii.

¹⁰⁶ *Historical Records of Australia. Resumed Series III, Volume vii.* Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service. 1997. p.790. n.321

Chapter Four

Van Diemen's Land Company

Genocide



Study of an aboriginal family. Thomas Bock 1793-1855 Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Hobart.

Within twelve months of the Company establishing a presence in the north west, the employees under Curr's direct control had gained a reputation for brutal treatment of the local Aboriginal population. An example of the scale and nature of the offences perpetrated by Company shepherds may be found in the Cape Grim Massacre. The circumstances surrounding this incident also reveal much about Curr's attitude to those Aborigines living under his jurisdiction and supposed protection.

The massacre itself was the culmination of a cycle of violence in which Curr was unwilling to use his authority to intervene as a circuit breaker, and he may well have encouraged and initiated some of the provocations. Some researchers, such as Geoff Lennox, have explained Curr's inaction in this and other incidents on the grounds of ignorance.¹ This position, however, overlooks the fact that Curr received regular field reports from his Superintendents and had ample authority to mount investigations and issue directives that had the force of law. The defence of ignorance appears particularly flimsy when subsequent inquiries by Robinson into these incidents found Company employees remarkably open and frank about their activities.

Curr also received numerous warnings, well documented in VDL Co records, that all was not well between his Company servants and the Aboriginal population.² Curr, however, ignored these early symptoms of conflict and they were never subject to any inquiry, investigation or intervention. In the case of the 1828 Cape Grim massacre, the first signs of trouble emerged when a shepherd, Thomas John, was brought back from the Cape with a spear wound to his thigh: the type of wound often inflicted by Aborigines as punishment for a breach of tribal custom. This proved to be the case as Robinson discovered when investigating the circumstances of this incident in 1830. He was informed by Aboriginal women that Company shepherds had "...got native women into their hut and wanted to take liberties with them...".³ The Aboriginal men retaliated by spearing Thomas John in the leg. In the clash that followed,

¹ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal*. Sandy Bay, Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings. 1990. Vol.37, p.4.

² Inward Despatch No.11. Curr to Directors. 28th February 1828. AOT. VDL 5/1: BR LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 33/1, p.304

³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.181

several Aborigines including a chief were subsequently shot dead.⁴ Jorgensen, concerned for the welfare of the North West Aborigines, had previously warned Arthur that the VDLC's men had "...designs of violating their women..."⁵ Curr, lacking either Jorgenson's perception or concern, made no attempt to substantiate the version of events provided by Thomas John, reporting verbatim to his Directors how a "...very strong party of Natives..." attacked the men in charge of the sheep at Cape Grim. After relating how the shepherd received his wound during an extended conflict, Curr concluded his report "I am under no apprehensions for the safety of either the men or the sheep".⁶ As Curr was aware of the full extent of Aboriginal casualties, his conclusion suggests he was of the opinion that they would be cowed by the experience and deterred from further action. Four weeks after this incident, a party of Aborigines, probably led by Wymeruck⁷ returned to Cape Grim seeking retribution. They destroyed 118 ewes of the Company's stock, spearing some and driving the remainder into the sea.⁸ This action in turn triggered an incident that involved the deployment of the Company Vessel the *Fanny*, an operation that could not have been mounted without the approval of the Chief Agent. Curr reported to his directors that a few days after the spearing of the sheep the *Fanny* was sent to Cape Grim:

⁴ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal op.cit.*, p.4

⁵ Arthur Papers A2209. Memorial from Jorgenson of 5 January 1828 cited in Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal op.cit.*, Appendix.1

⁶ Inward Despatch No.1. Curr to Directors. 2nd January 1828. AOT. VDL 5/1: BR LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 33/1, p.281

⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence, op.cit.*, p. 836 also see f/n 24 p.15

⁸ Inward Despatch No.2. Curr to Directors. 14th January 1828. AOT. VDL 5/1: BR LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 33/1, p.283

...The Fanny went there a few days after this occurred for wethers for the Emu Bay Establishment, and being detained two days by an easterly wind, the Master [Richard Frederick], who is very well acquainted with that part of the country and with the habits of the Natives, took the opportunity of going in quest of them, with three other men. They came about nightfall on a tribe of about seventy men, but it was judged better to take day light for the intended attack, and the party drew off until morning. It rained heavily during the night and when they approached in the morning close to the Natives with the intent of attacking them, not a musket would go off and they were obliged to retreat without firing a shot.⁹

In addition to Curr's official record of the event, there is another version, an account related to Rosalie Hare who visited Circular Head on the *Caroline* just a few weeks after the incident:

...The Master of the Company's cutter Fanny assisted by four shepherds and his crew, surprised a party and killed twelve. The rest escaped but afterwards followed them. They reached the vessel just in time to save their lives...¹⁰

In his account, Curr concealed the Aboriginal deaths from his directors, and portrayed the incident as an initiative of the Master of the *Fanny* who was simply an over zealous servant protecting company property. There are a number of problems associated with this account. It is unlikely that a servant of the Company would be allowed to use such a valuable asset as the *Fanny* in this way without permission from Curr. If the Master was very well acquainted with the "...habits of the Natives..." as Curr maintained, he would know that the Aborigines were very reluctant to move during the night, being timid in the dark. It is highly improbable that men armed with that knowledge, would sit in the cold and rain all night while their targets were

⁹ *ibid.*, p.283

¹⁰ Hare, Rosalie. *op.cit.*, p.41

silhouetted by campfires, only to await the light of morning and lose their strategic advantage. Also, men with only minimal experience in the bush would be well aware that after such a prolonged exposure to the elements, their muskets would be damp and too unreliable to risk against an armed enemy. Rosalie Hare's version of events is more plausible, as it was obtained directly from the people involved and fits more closely with Curr's deep distrust of the motives of the Aborigines and his ready recourse to force as a means of neutralising any perceived threat. Curr expressed these views quite clearly only a few weeks after this incident in a despatch to his directors: "...we can only hope to prevent our people from being murdered by obtaining and preserving the mastery over them".¹¹ One week after the *Fanny's* return on the 10 February 1828, and some six weeks after the destruction of the ewes, this cycle of violence culminated in the Cape Grim massacre when a large number of Aborigines were shot by Curr's men.

Curr's response to the massacre is instructive as it involved him directly, not only as the Manager of the employees involved, but also as the responsible Magistrate since the Aborigines killed were under his jurisdiction. There was no trial, investigation nor even a rudimentary inquiry into the incident. Curr saw no need to provide his Company with a detailed explanation, either of the killings or the circumstances that led to them. More seriously, Curr as Magistrate failed to make a report of the matter to Lieutenant Governor Arthur, who only learned of the incident eighteen months later from Company Superintendent Goldie in November 1829.¹²

¹¹ Inward Despatch No.11. Curr to Directors. 28th February 1828. AOT VDL 5/1: BR LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 33/1, p.304

¹² Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal op.cit.*, p.5

Goldie's¹³ letter to Arthur described Cape Grim as a place where:

...there have been a great many Natives shot by the Company's Servants, and several engagements between them while their stock was in that district. On one occasion a good many were shot (I never heard exactly the number) and although Mr Curr knew it, yet he never that I am aware, took any notice of it although in the Commission of the Peace and that time there was no proclamation against the Natives, nor were they (the Natives) at the time they were attacked at all disturbing the Company's flocks...¹⁴

This information prompted Arthur to request Robinson to obtain all possible information on the matter, which explains Robinson's close questioning of Company servants and local Aborigines while in the area in 1830.¹⁵

Curr's first despatch to his directors following the Cape Grim incident reported a long fight between his shepherds and a strong party of natives, a battle that resulted in Aboriginal casualties of six dead and several severely wounded.¹⁶ There was no hint of any injuries sustained by the shepherds nor was there any subsequent mention of the fate of the severely wounded Aborigines. Curr not only supported the actions of his employees in this despatch, but he also indicated some satisfaction with the outcome: "...I have no doubt that this will have the effect of intimidating them, and oblige them to keep aloof..."¹⁷ In a later despatch, Curr demonstrated his command of the details of the incident by refining the battle casualty report to six dead, one being a

¹³ Goldie paid a visit to the Cape Grim establishment and spoke to the men stationed there the evening before the massacre and could well have delivered instructions on behalf of Curr.

¹⁴ Letter from Goldie to Arthur, 18th November 1830. AOT CSO 280/25. pp. 488 - 489

¹⁵ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal* op.cit., p.4

¹⁶ Inward Despatch No.11. Curr to Directors. 28th February 1828. AOT VDL 5/1: BR LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 33/1, p.304

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.304

woman.¹⁸ However, Curr was quite capable of tailoring his facts to suit his needs, when later called upon to explain the situation to Arthur, he wrote "...I have no doubt that some natives were killed on the occasion, my impression is that the real number was three..."¹⁹ A cursory examination of some of the comments contained in Curr's initial despatch reporting the Cape Grim incident reveals an attitude towards the indigenous population that should have been of immediate concern to the directors. Curr explained that:

No one could feel more anxious than I have been, to avoid any kind of contention with these people, and I have always enjoined the men to have no communication with them whatever, either friendly or otherwise, knowing that their friendly visits are only paid for the purpose of ascertaining our means of defense and weak points, and are generally the forerunners of attacks. They have been the aggressors and strife, once begun with any of these tribes, has never yet been terminated, nor will, according to present appearances, but by their extermination.²⁰

Whether this final observation regarding extermination is a matter of Curr giving advice on an inevitable course of action, or merely a pessimistic view of the chain of events has been the cause of much conjecture.²¹ The former interpretation appears the most likely given the rapid demise of the Aborigines within the Company's jurisdiction and the fact that Curr was not a man to sit back and allow events to take their course. The directors also had their suspicions in this regard, as is evident in their reply to Curr's despatch, questioning his depiction of events and observing:

¹⁸ Inward Despatch No. 150. Curr to Directors. 7th October 1830. AOT VDL 5/1: pp. 104 - 105

¹⁹ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary, 18th May 1831. AOT. VDL 23/4 p.306

²⁰ Inward Despatch No. 11. *op.cit.*, p.304

²¹ Zeeman, Justin. *The Attitude of the Van Diemen's Land Company toward Aborigines living on the lands taken up by the Company 1827 - 1841*. Research Essay. University of Tasmania. 1991. p.10. also Dessailly, Bronwyn. *The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824 - 1836*, M.A. Thesis, University of Tasmania, 1977. p.188

...It is with no ordinary feelings of regret that the Court has read your account of the encounter with the Natives near Cape Grim. It does not appear from the account who were the aggressors...²²

Curr's other comments are also significant, as his instructions to Company employees effectively prevented the establishment of any dialogue or constructive relationship with the Aborigines. These instructions, as well as the standpoint adopted by Curr towards the Aborigines, demonstrates a complete rejection of the policies advocated by his Court of Directors. Also, by placing an embargo on contact with the Aboriginal population so early in the Company's establishment Curr effectively deprived the Aborigines of a voice in the Company's records. Consequently contemporary researchers have been denied access to an Aboriginal perspective on the activities of the VDL Co during the period prior to Robinson's arrival in the North West in June 1830.

Undeterred by Curr's pessimism and ignoring his advice, the directors continued to communicate their anxiety hoping:

... that every means should be tried to conciliate and civilise the natives to make them your friends instead of your enemies, this is no doubt a difficult task but still it is the duty of the Company to attempt it, and if they can be brought into a state of comparatively social comfort it will be conferring upon them a greater boon than the value of their range and hunting of the Lands of which they will be deprived, and of which the Company will have possession.

The Court cannot too strongly urge these attempts upon you...²³

²² Outward Despatch No. 83. Court to Curr. 28 October 1828.

²³ Outward Despatch No. 93. Court to Curr. 8th October 1829. Outward Letter Despatches 1825 to 1835. Microfilm Reel No.4. p.204. Ref. No. 338.76309946. Hellyer Library, Burnie.

The total disregard of these instructions and the comparative ease with which Robinson was able to gather information when conducting his investigation of the Cape Grim massacre also suggests either incompetence or duplicity on the part of Curr in his role as district Magistrate. On the 16 June 1830, Robinson simply interviewed Chamberlain, one of the four men directly²⁴ involved in the incident, to be readily advised that the number of Aborigines shot was about thirty.²⁵ There seemed little difficulty in extracting information as the following short extracts of the interview show.:

Robinson: "What did you do with the bodies?"

Chamberlain: "We threw them down the rocks where they had thrown the sheep".

Robinson: "Was there any more females shot?"

Chamberlain: "No, the women all laid down, they were most of them men".

Robinson: "They had been to the rocks to obtain food and you took advantage of them when they did not expect it. You got them on a point of the rocks where they could not get away and massacred them in cold blood".²⁶

Chamberlain's response is not recorded, but the implication is that Robinson's question accurately reflected the true nature of the event. In addition to giving some indication of the scale of the massacre, this interview also confirmed that far from any 'battle' taking place it was clearly a reprisal for the destruction of the sheep. Chamberlain's account was later corroborated by Aboriginal women who related how

²⁴ The four shepherds involved were: Charles Chamberlain, an assigned servant and hired servants John Weavis, William Gunshanan and Richard Nicholson.

²⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.175

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.175

the Company shepherds had taken "...by surprise a whole tribe which had come for a supply of mutton birds at the Doughboys, massacred thirty of them and threw them off a cliff two hundred feet in altitude..."²⁷ The Company Superintendent, Alexander Goldie, also reported to Arthur that the native losses were "very high".²⁸ Later, when confronted with Goldie's version of events, Curr sought to excuse his inaction in a despatch to his directors, by arguing:

...I had thought of investigating the case, but I saw first that there was a strong presumption that our men were right, second if wrong it was impossible to convict them, and thirdly that the mere enquiry would induce every man to leave Cape Grim.²⁹

Apart from revealing both his bias and the position that justice occupied in his order of priorities, this was an uncharacteristically humble response from the "Potentate of the North". In the same despatch Curr defended the actions of his employees, arguing that:

...our men were fully impressed with the idea that the natives were there only for the purpose of surrounding and attacking them, and with that idea it would be madness for them to wait until the natives shewed their designs by making it too late for one man to escape...³⁰

It was a defence which, if achieving nothing else, revealed Curr's approval of the use of pre-emptive force as an appropriate strategy when dealing with Aborigines. Whilst the precise number of Aborigines killed in this particular incident remains unclear, there is ample evidence that this massacre along with other killings perpetrated by

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.181

²⁸ Letter from Goldie to Arthur, 18th November 1829. AOT CSO 1/33/7578. pp. 116-117

²⁹ Inward Despatch No. 150. Curr to Directors. 7th October 1830. AOT VDL 5/1: pp. 104 - 105

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 104 - 105

Company employees had decimated the Aboriginal population. Cassandra Pybus noted in her *Community of Thieves*³¹ that there are still local historians who maintain a long tradition of denying either the massacre or its magnitude in a parochial attempt to preserve the image and reputation of the VDL Co. For example, Pauline Buckby states in *Around Circular Head* that "...It was from this spot, in 1827, the Aborigines drove precious Saxon merino sheep down the steep cliff into the sea. The legend arose, from this incident, whereby it was said that the last of the Aborigines were sent to their death at Slaughter Hill..."³² This account provides the precise breeds of sheep involved and their destruction is presented as a fact, while the death of the local Aborigines is relegated to the status of a legend. Buckby's focus on the loss of "precious" sheep rather than human life is typical of the accounts that seek to hide or at least obscure Curr's actions. Another prominent local historian, Kerry Pink, accepts the fact that the massacre took place but questions the magnitude of the crime. Pink, after noting the well documented agility of Aborigines on both land and sea, asks "...How then, could four shepherds, untrained and unskilled in the use of cumbersome, muzzle-loading firearms, kill 30 before they escaped into the sea or over the cliffs of the bay?..."³³

Lennox, cites the military record of one of the shepherds - John Weavis - a former soldier who served in the York Chasseurs, as part of the answer. Weavis would have had ample time to pass on his military experience and train his companions in the competent use of the musket. However, the real solution may be found in the fact

³¹ Pybus, Cassandra. *Community of Thieves*. Minerva Australia. Port Melbourne. 1992. p.90

³² Buckby, Pauline. *Around Circular Head*. Denbar Publishers, Tasmania. 1984. p.21

³³ Pink, Kerry. *The Woolnorth Massacre*. Circular Head Local History Journal. 1986. ii (4) also Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal op.cit.*, p.7

that the shepherds did not use their muskets in the military fashion by firing a single ball. The most common musket in use at that time was the Indian Pattern Smooth Bore Musket.³⁴ These early muskets had a smooth bore that, unlike rifles, were capable of using shot with no damage to the barrel. Far from being a "...cumbersome..." weapon, they had a calibre of .75 in (19.05 mm), a bore wide enough to handle a load of shot or pistol balls sufficient to have had a devastating and widespread effect on human targets at close range. Armed with such weapons the shepherds at Cape Grim would have been quite capable of killing the thirty Aborigines claimed by Robinson's witnesses. The VDLC's practice of using shot in their muskets may be evidenced by an incident that took place just seven months later at the Burleigh hut. After a serious and violent clash with Aborigines, Fossey sent a message to Circular Head complaining of having only "...1³/₄ lbs Gunpowder and no shot..."; he also asked to be supplied with "...Gunpowder Buckshot Muskets and Cutlasses..." as a matter of urgency.³⁵

Curr had good reasons to suppress the details of the Cape Grim massacre. The actions of his men were not only contrary to the expressed wishes of his directors, but also revealed Curr's contempt for the main thrust of the Company's policy towards Aborigines. The Company's position was best summed up by the Managing Director, James Bischoff who wrote:

The original possessors of the land must have regarded the European settlers as invaders or uninvited, obtrusive guests; and the occupation of land and encroachment upon their hunting grounds, could be alone justified, but the hope that these degraded

³⁴ Blair, Claude (ed.) *Pollard's History of Firearms*. Middlesex. Hamelyn Publishing Group. 1983. p.137

³⁵ Letter from Hellyer to T.W.White. 25 September 1828. AOT VDL 23/2 p.304

and wretched savages might be taught the arts of civilised life, and from a state of misery advanced to comfort and happiness.³⁶

It is fair to say that Curr realised it was also in the Company's interests that the seriousness of the incident be kept from the authorities. The Company was still in the process of negotiating the final boundaries of its land grant, and Curr would have been well aware that news of this sort could cost it much needed support in government circles.³⁷ As a consequence, Curr not only failed to inform Arthur that an incident took place but took the precaution - perhaps to neutralise any possible rumours - of organising some positive public relations. On the 15 August 1828, the Hobart press reported that:

...Persons in the service of the V.D.Land Company, who have arrived in town from Circular head last week, inform us, that the black natives in that quarter are extremely quiet and do not possess the spirit of revenge so predominant in other parts of the Island; and much to the praise of Mr. Curr, orders had been given that they were not to be troubled in any way whatever, unless guilty of dishonest or improper conduct, (to the former they are much addicted,) and on no account, to kill any of them.³⁸

Rosalie Hare, who stayed with the Curr family at Circular Head a few weeks after the massacre, spoke to some of the 'persons in the service of the VDLC' and wrote in her diary:

We have to lament that our own countrymen consider the massacre of these people an honour. While we remained at Circular Head there were several accounts of considerable numbers of natives having been shot by them (the Company men), they wishing to extirpate them entirely, if possible.³⁹

³⁶ Bischoff, James. *A Sketch of the History of Van Diemen's Land*, London, Richardson, 1832. Facsimile Edition, Libraries Board of South Australia. 1967. p.36

³⁷ Desailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.185

³⁸ *The Tasmanian* (Hobart) Vol.11. No.77. 15 August, 1828

³⁹ Hare, Rosalie. *op.cit.*, p.41

The sentiments reported by Hare were later echoed by Gunshanan in an interview with Robinson. When warned that the killing of Aborigines may be construed as murder, Robinson noted that Gunshanan "...seemed to glory in the act and said he would shoot them whenever he met them..."⁴⁰

The authorities, unaware of the VDLC's actions against the Aborigines, continued negotiating the final positioning of the Company's land grant. Arthur, intrigued by Hellyer's description of the Hampshire and Surrey Hills, decided to inspect them in person. After viewing the mediocre quality of the pasture, Arthur expressed some reservations as to the viability of the area for wool production. Nevertheless, despite his misgivings, Arthur wrote to London to give his support to Curr's amended claims,⁴¹ and recommended that the VDLC's land be increased by 100,000 acres to compensate for the unusable areas of the now 350,000 acre grant⁴² (see Appendix One).

In the meantime, the VDL Co directors persisted in their efforts to pursue a mutually beneficial relationship with the Aborigines that could in time, perhaps, justify the process of dispossession. The directors had also closely followed the fortunes of their rival company the AACo and were inspired by the example of Robert Dawson, who had successfully incorporated local Aborigines into his company's operations. In August 1828 the directors, hoping to retrieve the situation in Van Diemen's Land, provided Curr with a:

⁴⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.196

⁴¹ Arthur was satisfied that the Company's lands were sufficiently remote as to pose no threat of encroaching on the activity of free settlers.

⁴² Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, pp. 191 - 192

...report of the Australian Company and the favourable result of Mr Dawson's conciliatory contact with the natives of New South Wales. The fear is that as blood has now been shed the attempts to improve the condition of these poor creatures will be much retarded but still the Court cannot too strongly impress upon you ... its anxiety on their account and earnestly recommends that no effort may be spared which will tend to this desirable result...If they could be taught, as Mr Dawson has taught them that there are good Englishmen as well as bad, and whilst their land is taken possession of, their persons could be protected and their comforts increased. These poor wretches may still be brought into the social order and may add to the safety and prosperity of settlers. The Court will at some future period draw your attention again to this interestingly important subject and in the meantime they have to request you will impress upon the minds of everyone that all will be done to endeavour to win them by kindness and by such small presents as will be most acceptable to them and will excite them to friendship and usefulness.⁴³

Clearly, the AAC's Scottish born manager, Robert Dawson, had a very different approach and attitude towards the Aborigines than did Curr. Dawson began to build a rapport and cultivate a personal relationship with the Aborigines almost from the day he arrived. While he and his party were making their way from Sydney to the site of the AAC's operations at Port Stephens, Dawson encouraged the Aborigines met on the journey to join with them. The Europeans shared their food with the Aborigines and were rewarded in turn by being led to the sites of spring water along the way. Dawson took this opportunity to study his new companions and their language closely. He was later moved to describe them as "...cheerful and obliging people..." reporting how they "...supported me greatly in the daily performance of the arduous and anxiously responsible duties which I had taken upon myself..." and declaring that he would trust himself "... alone with them in any situation..."⁴⁴

⁴³ Outward Despatch No.64. Court to Curr. 1st August 1828. Outward Letter Despatches 1825 to 1835. p.204. Burnie. Hellyer Library.

⁴⁴ Dawson, Robert. *The present state of Australia : a description of the country, its advantages and prospects, with reference to emigration; and a particular account ... of its aboriginal inhabitants.*

On arrival at Port Stephens, the Aborigines were quickly incorporated into the Company's activities, initially as guides when seeking new pastures or fresh water and later as messengers and cook's aides. Unfortunately, relations with some of the local Aborigines had been recently soured by the activities of timber getters from Sydney. These were usually parties of convicts organised by licensed entrepreneurs whose business was to harvest the valuable Cedar wood found along the rivers in that part of New South Wales. The timber getters had committed acts of violence against the Aborigines, who in turn took whatever reprisals they could, mostly against white settlers and runaway convicts.⁴⁵ Dawson was not long established at Port Stephens when he received a report accusing some cedar cutters of murdering an eight year old Aboriginal boy called Tommy. Unlike Curr, Dawson used his powers as magistrate and manager to protect the Aborigines under his sway. Accordingly, he immediately issued a warrant and despatched some employees to arrest the men accused. Two men were subsequently apprehended and sent for trial in Sydney where they were both found to be guilty.⁴⁶ Dawson later described his policy towards the Aborigines:

My object has always been to conciliate them, to give them an interest in cultivating our friendship, and to afford them protection against any injuries or insults from the people on this establishment, or elsewhere, within my jurisdiction.⁴⁷

Dawson gradually won the respect and trust of the neighbouring tribes and eventually the AAC's station was able to employ Aborigines as store guards and stockmen as well as utilise their hunting skills to harvest fish and game.

London : Smith, Elder, 1831. Alburgh : Archival Facsimiles. 1987. pp. 28 - 29

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 41 - 42

⁴⁶ The government suspended the execution of the two men for six months, later commuted to perpetual banishment on Norfolk Island. On route to the island one of the accused took part in an abortive mutiny and was duly hanged, the other was later hanged for fresh crimes committed.

⁴⁷ Dawson, Robert. *op.cit.*, pp. 57 - 58

Curr eventually replied to his director's pleas to establish friendly relations with the Aborigines, and in doing so, he made it abundantly clear that he thought any effort expended in that direction to be futile:

I observe the very great importance which the Court attaches to the hostilities which have taken place between Company Stockmen in common with others in the Island and the Natives...the Court knows that the bias of Colonel Arthur's Government in a question of this kind would also be to the side of philanthropy...but where are the results...These plans have ended in what I can only consider as a war of extermination. The recent proclamation of Martial Law does not speak this out in very clear terms but it is to be the practical effect of it. It is to be lamented that discord should ever have arisen between the Colonists and the aborigines and I will not say that if the first acquaintance were yet to be formed it might not be possible so to act as to maintain peaceable terms with them. But we found all the mischief done, discord has already gone to that length that there was no safety for a White man but in the destruction of his Black opponent.⁴⁸

Curr was equally unimpressed by the presentation of the AAC's company manager Robert Dawson as an example from which to model his own conduct. Dismissing Dawson's report, Curr argued that it:

...relates to a comparatively civilized race of people...Had he come upon a Van Diemens Land tribe in the same manner he would have learnt nothing of them but the length of their spears. The only consolatory reflection connected with the subject is that with ordinary precaution there is little to be apprehended from them. We may count on losing lives by them and sometimes stock but nothing that will affect the Company's pursuits.⁴⁹

Curr's response to his directors despatch showed that his antipathy towards an Aboriginal presence was firmly entrenched. He pointed out that even men of goodwill and power such as the Lieutenant Governor were inevitably reduced to

⁴⁸ Inward Despatch No. 55. Curr to Directors. 17 January 1829. AOT VDL 5/1

⁴⁹ *ibid.*,

enacting policies that lead to the extermination of the Aborigines.⁵⁰ This is a prospect that Curr accepted with few misgivings, as he saw the destruction of the Aborigines as necessary in order to secure the safety of Europeans. Curr then attempted to absolve himself of any responsibility for the existing state of affairs by arguing that at the time of his arrival, Aboriginal/European relationships had already deteriorated to the point from which there was no recovery. He also added the excuse that Dawson was presented with much more favourable circumstances in New South Wales than existed in Van Diemen's Land. These latter claims were of course false. Dawson had to contend with some residual hostility and suspicion resulting from the actions of the timber getters, whereas the North West tribes were open and friendly at the time of the VDLC's arrival; a point Curr freely admitted in earlier correspondence.⁵¹ Some of the negativity expressed by Curr in the above despatch was no doubt influenced by a recent sequence of hostile incidents, again initiated by VDL Co servants, that ended with the Aborigines effectively demonstrating their capacity and willingness to take reprisals. On the 25 September 1828 Fossey, who was visiting the Hampshire Hills forwarded an urgent message via Hellyer at Emu Bay to Circular Head reporting how, on that afternoon:

...two of the men from Burleigh had reached this place in a most deplorable state namely Gunshannan and N. Russell and at this moment ½ past five poor Murray and McGuffee literally covered with blood have just crawled in from the same place. The natives attacked them yesterday afternoon (the 23rd) at 3 o'clock and left one or two of them for dead and the four lacerated beings have been ever since getting thus far...It appears that Murray and McGuffee were away about the lambs and Russell and Gunshannan were also away digging a Garden. Thompson their mate was away

⁵⁰ Curr, along with many other settlers interpreted the introduction of Martial Law as an open invitation to kill Aborigines

⁵¹ See text on page 100, Inward Despatch No.42. Curr to Directors. 13 February 1827.

at the Hampshire Hills with a Steer for killing and the natives must have watched their opportunity...⁵²

Curr informed his directors of the attack on the 8 October:

...The natives have made an attack upon the Stock Keepers at Burleigh, speared them all and left them for dead though I am happy to say every one of them has escaped with his life to the Hampshire Hills and are now doing well...From a severe misfortune we shall extract a wholesome lesson of prudence on which will save many lives...⁵³

The circumstances leading up to the attack were common knowledge at the establishment, as Curr revealed in an earlier letter to Hellyer where he stated that:

...the first aggression was committed by two men bringing Mr Fossey's bullocks from the Mersey about the time the Western Road party was disbanded. When the first attack was made by the blacks at Burghley the report of the day was, that they said to our men that it was done in retaliation for the murder of a woman by two white men, the two white men I believe were those referred to above, of whom I think Reuben Jenkins was one...⁵⁴

However, Curr neglected to inform his directors of the reason for the attack until a year after the event.⁵⁵ This delay allowed Curr to make some limited political capital out of the incident, as the biased account that the directors were reliant upon appeared to justify his position that there could be no coexistence with the Aborigines. Curr's strategy met with some measure of success as the directors could not turn a blind eye to an unprovoked attack on their own servants. Although Curr was again urged to take every "...measure...to conciliate and civilize the natives to make them your

⁵² Letter from Hellyer to T.W.White. 25 September 1828. AOT VDL 23/2 p.304

⁵³ Inward Despatch No. 45. Curr to Directors. 8 October 1828. AOT VDL 5/1 pp. 184 - 186

⁵⁴ Letter from Curr to Hellyer. 11 September 1830. AOT VDL 23/3 pp. 505 -506

⁵⁵ See Inward Despatch No.100. Curr to Directors. 16 November 1829. AOT VDL 5/1 pp. 209 - 210

friends instead of your enemies..." the directors also thought it time that the "...strength and power of the Company..." be "...impressed upon the natives..."⁵⁶ Curr was further advised that, to assist in this endeavour, the Court would send:

...some Fire Arms, particularly pistols which they conceive will be of far more use than muskets because they can be carried about the person; you will therefore be fully prepared for war and possessing power, you will leave no steps untried to prevent hostile contact with the Natives and to promote friendship and conciliation.⁵⁷

Maintaining the same stance he adopted at the time of the Cape Grim massacre, Curr made no attempt to conduct an official enquiry or to even take the rudimentary step of interviewing the servants involved. As Curr had no doubt approved of the use of the *Fanny* to attack Aborigines after the slaughter of the sheep at Cape Grim, he also condoned Goldie's actions in organising a counter attack following the Burleigh Hut incident.⁵⁸ While the attack on the Burleigh Hut was most likely carried out by members of the Northern tribes, the next serious incident with Aborigines probably involved a different tribe: the Tommeginers from the North West. On the 21 August 1829, a party of VDL Co employees that included Russell⁵⁹ were working under the supervision of Alexander Goldie, erecting sheep sheds on the coast near the Cam River a few miles to the west of Emu Bay. An encounter with some Aborigines took place that resulted in the killing of one Aboriginal woman and the capture of another.⁶⁰ After making a prisoner of the surviving woman as well as a six year old girl - the child of the woman who was killed - Goldie made a report to Curr describing

⁵⁶ Outward Despatch No. 93. Court to Curr. 6 April 1829. AOT VDL 1/4

⁵⁷ *ibid.*,

⁵⁸ Letter from Goldie to Curr. 5 October 1829. AOT CO 1/280/25. Vol. 8. pp. 478 - 482

⁵⁹ Russell had recently recovered from wounds incurred at Burleigh Hut

⁶⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.192. Robinson places the site of the murder as two miles east of the Cam River the present Cooee Point

the incident. The report detailed how the VDL Co working party, on spotting a small group of natives, herded two native women and a child on to the beach in an attempt to capture them. When one of the women escaped into the scrub, Goldie rode after her and brought her back. In the meantime the other woman was shot and wounded, then finally killed by an axe-stroke to the neck, severing the jugular vein.⁶¹ In his response Curr wrote:

It has never occurred to me since I have been in the service of the Van Diemen's Land Company to read a more revolting detail than that contained in your letter and the manner in which the barbarous transaction is related without one word of disapprobation being expressed against your associates in the deed or one word of regret, is scarcely less offensive to every feeling of humanity than the deed itself. That the killing of this woman amounts to murder in a moral sense, I have no doubt whatsoever, and as little that you are a guilty party accessory to the crime. What may be thought of it in a legal sense I do not know, but it is my bounden duty to communicate to the Governor all that I know and to request that I may be instructed what steps to take regarding it.⁶²

Goldie must have been surprised to receive such a letter from Curr, the same man who had suggested to his directors that the massacre of Aborigines at Cape Grim would serve the function of 'intimidation'.⁶³ Relations with the Aborigines had deteriorated considerably since the Cape Grim massacre and, as Goldie claimed, the shooting of Aborigines had become common place within the VDL Co grant. Earlier that year on the 22 January 1829, Hellyer was travelling with Fossey, McKay and Isaac Cutts near the mouth of the Arthur River. Hellyer reported that they fell in with some natives who "...fled leaving baskets, skins and everything...." Three days

⁶¹ Letter from Goldie to Directors. 23 February 1830. AOT CSO 1/330/7578. Vol.15. pp. 114-115

⁶² Letter from Curr to Goldie. 30 September 1829

⁶³ Letter from Goldie to Arthur. 18 November 1830. AOT CO 1/280/25 p.487

later Hellyer recorded that his party had arrived at the Duck River "...after a narrow escape, the natives having set fire a thicket which we were struggling to get through. We rushed through the flames...We saw the natives with fire and tried to shoot them, but although not ten yards off they all escaped...".⁶⁴ This was the same area where less than two years earlier Jorgenson and Lorymer travelled in absolute safety, were treated by the Aborigines in a friendly manner and parted company with them on the best of terms.

Curr's reply to Goldie's report was out of character, clearly contrived, and Goldie thought as much. The relationship between the two had been deteriorating for some time and Curr was withholding a substantial pay rise from Goldie that the directors had recently awarded to him.⁶⁵ Moreover, unlike earlier incidents that took place well within the Company's boundaries, this killing was only a few miles from the settlement at Emu Bay from where the news was bound to reach Hobart and the ears of the authorities. Distrusting Curr's motives, and fearing he was about to be made a scapegoat, Goldie, unbeknown to Curr, forwarded an account of his version of events to Arthur. It was this correspondence that detailed other killings committed by Company employees with Curr's knowledge and acquainted Arthur with the Cape Grim massacre for the first time.⁶⁶

When Curr first notified Arthur of the killing, now commonly referred to as the Goldie incident, he enclosed an extract of Goldie's original report. As the original was not a lengthy document an extract would appear quite unnecessary, until one reads the

⁶⁴ McKay, Thelma. *op.cit.*, pp. 22 - 23

⁶⁵ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal.* *op.cit.*, p.14

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.5

section withheld. This reveals Goldie, a senior company official, endorsing the practise of Company employees capturing and utilising Aboriginal women as slaves. The language Goldie used in his report suggests no expectation of disapproval or surprise on the part of his manager. Referring to the surviving woman, Goldie wrote:

The woman is in irons I make her wash potatoes for the horses and intend taking her to the hills and making her work...the Woman will not speak and is often very sulky. She broke her irons once and was nearly getting away I think she is about 20 or 22 years old. I have no doubt she will work. Barras can make her do anything.⁶⁷

Curr had good reason to hold back the latter part of Goldie's report, and it had little to do with any attempt on his part to make things easier for Goldie as suggested by Lennox.⁶⁸ Slavery was now illegal, and Curr, along with other settlers in Van Diemen's Land, were well aware of Arthur's sensibilities regarding this issue. Prior to his current appointment, Arthur, as Lieutenant Governor of Honduras, had opposed the settlers' exploitation and mistreatment of their black slaves.⁶⁹ Curr also maintained his former reluctance to use his position as magistrate in matters involving the killing of Aborigines, as he closed his initial report to Arthur pleading that:

...Two circumstances induce me to make this presentation to His Excellency. The first is that having been confined with little exception to the house since the 11th August by illness I am wholly unable to go to Emu Bay to investigate the affair. The second is that in a matter which may be considered in so serious a light, I feel it exceedingly difficult to act without advice or assistance of any kind...⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Letter from Goldie to Curr. 16 September 1829. held in typescript form in AOT

⁶⁸ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal. op.cit.*, p.16

⁶⁹ On one occasion had Arthur incurred the wrath of slave owners by intervening to free some Indians who had been illegally enslaved. Levy, M.C.I. *Governor George Arthur*. Melbourne. Georgian House Pty. Ltd. 1953. pp. 22 - 24

⁷⁰ Letter from Curr to Arthur. 30 April 1829. AOT CSO 1/330/7578. Vol.15 pp. 40 - 41

While it is true, as Lennox points out,⁷¹ that Curr had suffered from severe attacks of rheumatism in the past, it is not possible to establish whether Curr was genuinely ill on this occasion. Arthur, ever a practical man, replied by advising Curr that as this was a case that required a Magisterial enquiry, if he was too ill to proceed to Emu Bay, he should issue a warrant and bring the parties to Circular Head.⁷² Arthur also added, somewhat sharply, that this was an obvious course of action to take and expressed his regret that Curr did not resort to it the moment he was first advised of the incident. On receipt of Arthur's letter, Curr informed his directors that "...it is apparent that I cannot escape the painful duty of investigating that occurrence myself as I sincerely hoped I might have done..."⁷³ Arthur's letter seems to have motivated Curr's interest though not his recuperation, for although he set out for Emu Bay to conduct the enquiry in person, he did not do so until the 16 December.

The enquiry, such as it was, simply consisted in Curr taking a statement from Thomas Watson the storekeeper at Emu Bay. Curr explained that this was all he could do because he was stranded for two days without a horse⁷⁴ and Goldie was away at Burleigh Hut in relation to another Aboriginal attack. Sweetling, the man who struck the Aboriginal women with the axe, had since been speared and was recovering at the Hampshire Hills.

While Curr was interviewing Watson on the 17 December, Goldie was still available to give evidence as he didn't leave Emu Bay for Burleigh Hut until the 18 December. Shortly after leaving Emu Bay, Goldie began undermining Curr's authority by touring

⁷¹ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal.* *op.cit.*, p.16

⁷² CO 280/25 pp. 434 - 435

⁷³ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal.* *op.cit.*, p.16

⁷⁴ A poor excuse, a few more days would have been of no consequence especially after Curr's one month delay in setting out from Circular Head.

the company stock huts warning other servants that if discovered killing Aborigines while defending the company's interests, they too would be on their own and liable for murder charges.⁷⁵ Curr omitted to inform Arthur that he procured a horse and visited Burleigh Hut on the 22nd and the Racecourse on the 23rd in order to confront Goldie and Hellyer about their recent questioning of his authority. This visit would have provided a further opportunity to take evidence from Goldie and Sweetling. Probably in an attempt to reassert his authority over Goldie, Curr used the occasion to lead a party of unenthusiastic servants on an attack on some Aborigines near the Racecourse. Curr was later compelled to admit and justify his part in instigating the attack, after Goldie publicly accused him of offering spirits to the men as an inducement to bring him an Aboriginal head.⁷⁶ Writing to the Directors on 7 October 1830, Curr admitted:

...My whole and sole object was to kill them, and this because my full conviction was and is that the laws of nature and of God and of this country all conspired to render this my duty... And although I feel a perfect loathing to the idea of shedding human blood and know no difference in that respect between white and black, yet I regret upon principle that I was not successful against them. I think it would have done good, it would have alarmed the Natives more than anything else, prevented them from attempting our huts again, made them keep aloof, given them a lesson they would long have remembered and really been the means of saving more of their lives eventually than it would have cost them, as well as some of our own. As to my expression of a wish to have three of their heads to put on the ridge of the hut, I shall only say that I think it certainly would have the effect of deterring some of their comrades, of making the death of their companions live in their recollections, and so extend the advantage the example made of them...⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Letter from Goldie to Curr 5 October 1829. a copy forwarded to Arthur on the same day AOT CO 1/280/25. Vol.8. pp. 480 - 481

⁷⁶ Letter from Goldie to Arthur 18 November 1829. AOT CO 1/280/25. Vol.8. p. 488

⁷⁷ Inward Despatch No.150. Curr to Directors. 7 October 1830. Hellyer Reference Library SLTX/AO/EP/72 VDL 5. Reel 33. p.112

Following his return from the abortive attack, Curr again turned his attention to the enquiry he was supposed to be conducting. After considering the facts at his disposal, Curr concluded that the proclamation of martial Law "...against the Natives makes the destruction of them no offence in law...",⁷⁸ thus the killing of the woman could not be legally construed as murder.

Watson, whose statement was the only new evidence unearthed by Curr's investigation, obtained his information by talking to the men involved immediately following the incident. Consequently, his account is very close to that of Goldie's version of events (see Appendix Nine). His statement however, did confirm that it was Nathaniel Russell who fired the shot,⁷⁹ this information had some significance as Russell, following his wounding in the Burleigh Hut incident, had earlier "...vowed vengeance..." against the Aborigines.⁸⁰ Watson closed his statement by adding:

...I saw two Natives brought as Prisoners to this place the day the woman was stated to have been killed, one was a woman and the other a Girl about four or five years of age. The little girl, Russell said, was by the woman when he fired, but he did not see her when he fired. Sweetling, when he acknowledged that he struck the woman with the axe said he was so agitated at the time he did not know what he was doing and that if he had had time to reflect he did not think he could have done it.⁸¹

Watson's detailed knowledge of the affair demonstrated that unlike earlier incidents, it would have been impossible for Curr, as he no doubt realised, to have kept the affair

⁷⁸ Inward Despatch No.108. Curr to Directors. 4 January 1830. AOT VDL 5/1 pp. 240 - 260

⁷⁹ Goldie came under some criticism for allowing Russell to carry the gun, knowing that he was bent on revenge.

⁸⁰ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal. op.cit.*, p.15

⁸¹ Thomas Watson's Deposition. 17 December 1829. AOT CSO 1/330/7578. Vol.15. pp. 63 - 65

hidden from the authorities' attention. Curr enclosed Watson's deposition in a letter to Arthur, offering his opinion on the matter and asking for further legal advice.

On receipt of Curr's correspondence, Arthur sought the advice of the Solicitor General Alfred Stephen, which was in turn communicated to Curr. In short, Stephen argued that the whole issue hinged on whether the woman died from the gunshot wound or the axe blow, and if from the latter, how long after capture. As martial law was in force at the time, the shooting in itself would not constitute an offense. However, the killing of a prisoner would amount to murder, particularly if it took place some time after capture. As a consequence of Stephen's advice, the fatal nature of the gunshot wound was accentuated in further enquiries, while the impact of the axe blow was progressively trivialised, to the point where it was described as "...trifling like a lancet cut..."⁸² Goldie's original report to Arthur stated that "...one of the men hit her on the neck with an axe, and cut the Jugular vein, when she died instantly..."⁸³ Arthur made no comment on the obvious discrepancy between the account provided by Goldie in his letter and that submitted from the enquiry. Perhaps Arthur was mindful of Stephen's observation that:

...If the killing of the poor woman be held a crime cognizable by the Common Law, the effect of the Proclamation will be forever afterwards destroyed. Few would with alacrity risk their lives in the pursuit of these now sanguinary people, if aware that for every life destroyed the party taking it might be compelled to answer for it at the risk of his own...⁸⁴

⁸² Letter from Curr to Arthur. 21 April 1830. AOT CSO 1.330/7578. Vol. 15. pp. 118 - 199

⁸³ Letter from Goldie to Arthur. 5 October 1829. AOT CO 280/25 pp. 468 - 474

⁸⁴ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal. op.cit.*, p.20

The case was finally dismissed, and Goldie, by now totally at odds with Curr, prepared to resign his position with the Company. After news of the incident reached London, Arthur was called upon to provide full details of the case to Sir George Murray. Arthur's reports were evasive, but eventually accepted, and all mention of the affair was excluded from the published despatches in the 1831 Parliamentary Paper on Tasmanian Aborigines. Lord Howick minuted the closure of the incident after receiving Arthur's report, with the note "...acknowledge, approving his not having interfered in the disputes of the company's servants..."⁸⁵ The decision to cease further investigations into the incident and to let the matter lie may have been, as Desailly suggests, in deference to the growing humanitarian lobby in England at that time.⁸⁶

As noted earlier, there have been a number of writers and local historians who have made it their goal to protect the reputation of the VDL Co. A practice that has served to mask both the scale and deliberate nature of company assaults on the Aborigines. The Goldie incident provides many examples of this custom. One finds in the Burnie *Advocate's* 1925 serialised history of the VDL Company the following depiction of events:

...In the pursuit of a band which had attacked the Emu Bay settlement, a woman was shot, and clubbed by a man named Russell. This nearly led to his arrest on a charge of murder and of Mr. Goldie, who was in charge at the time, as an accessory...⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Shaw. A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p.iii. f/n: 22

⁸⁶ Desailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.201

⁸⁷ Sanderson. R.S. *Sanderson's History of the Van Diemen's Land Company*. Installment. 10. *Advocate* (Burnie) 18 November 1925

This unfounded and inaccurate report serves no other purpose but to indict the Aborigines as the aggressors, thus exonerating the VDLC's servant's actions. In a similar vein, K.R. Von Stieglitz, in his work on the company history reported under a section entitled "The Blacks" that:

At Emu Bay (Burnie) Goldie and a man named Russell, when attacked by a mob of aborigines, chased them back into the hills. Running at great speed, Russell overtook one of the native women, who was hiding among some tussocks behind a log and clubbed the unfortunate creature to death with the stock of this gun. For this action he only escaped a charge of murder on a fine point of law. Goldie was charged with being an accessory, but through Curr's intervention, was let off with a caution.⁸⁸

Again, although the incident was 'unfortunate' the Aborigines were ultimately portrayed as the aggressors and the cause of their own misfortune.

While the eventual outcome of the enquiry and subsequent investigations into the affair proved inconclusive, the Goldie incident played an important part in both VDL Co and Aboriginal history for a number of reasons. It was Goldie's correspondence with Arthur that first alerted the colonial authorities to the systematic killing of Aborigines that was taking place under Curr's administration. Arthur was sufficiently concerned with these reports that he asked Robinson to make further investigations in to some of Goldie's claims while on the Company's lands.⁸⁹ Robinson's enquiries revealed the detail of the Cape Grim massacre and the open culture of hostility towards Aborigines held by the VDL Co employees.⁹⁰ Also, Curr's attempts to shift

⁸⁸ Von Stieglitz, K.R. *A Short History of Circular Head and Its Pioneers also of the V.D.L. Company*. Launceston. Telegraph Printery Pty. Ltd. 1952. p.26

⁸⁹ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal*. op.cit., p.24

⁹⁰ After Robinson reprimanded Gunshannan for his part in the Cape Grim massacre, Robinson reported that: "...He seemed to glory in the act and said that he would shoot them whenever he

all responsibility for the killing on to his employees' shoulders exacerbated existing tensions and divisions between the manager and his officers. As far as the local Aborigines were concerned, Curr's comments to his directors proved to be prophetic when he warned "...there is no doubt I think that the recent cold blooded murder at Emu Bay will have its consequences....".⁹¹

Following the Goldie incident, the VDL Co was plagued by Aboriginal guerilla style raids, mostly on the remote and vulnerable stock huts. These attacks were to continue until there was literally not one single Aborigine left in the entire North West region to mount them. Sweetling⁹² was one of the early casualties in these attacks, almost losing his life after being speared in the back during an ambush on the Emu Bay Road on 1 December 1829, less than three months after his participation in the Goldie incident.⁹³ In March 1830, Curr was called upon by the "Committee for the care and Management of the captive aborigines" to answer a number of queries relating to the VDLC's experience with the local Aboriginal tribes. After making a few brief comments on the Cape Grim, Burleigh Hut, Goldie and other incidents, Curr advanced some of his own opinions on what should be done. However, before doing so he made it abundantly clear that the whole responsibility for the Aboriginal 'problem' lay with the government "...The Crown sells us lands, and is therefore bound to make good our titles and possession against previous occupants and

met them..." see Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.196

⁹¹ Inward Despatch No. 100. Curr to Directors. 16 November 1829. VDL 5/1 pp. 209 - 210

⁹² Curr was later to recommend Sweetling for a ticket of leave, noting that he considered him to be one of the most useful and disciplined men in the company's service. see Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, p.37

⁹³ This attack may have been a consequence of the Goldie incident, Robinson was advised by Aborigines at Mine.Dim (Cape Grim) that the husband of the woman killed by Sweetling and Russell vowed to revenge her murder on every white man "...he had a chance to meet..." and which it "...appears he has done in numerous instances..." see Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*, *op.cit.*, p.192

claimants...".⁹⁴ Curr then argued that the government was faced with two stark choices: they must either "...submit to see the white inhabitants murdered one after another, or they must undertake a war of extermination...".⁹⁵ Here, Curr was again advancing the same opinion he had earlier put to his directors, that the extermination of the Aborigines was inevitable.⁹⁶ If this then, was Curr's long held opinion, it is a reasonable assumption to expect that his domestic policies would be guided by that view. Curr closed his submission with the assurance, after making the suggestion, that he was "...far from advising such a proceeding...";⁹⁷ he would not countenance bloodshed except in the case of "...aggression or self-defence...". Curr had rather a proactive view regarding self defence; he outlined some of his favoured measures in a letter to Lee Archer:

"I have tried the effect of spring guns in the huts, which they have once discharged, and must have escaped from almost by miracle.

I am now trying a man-trap, also in one of the huts.

I have for a week concealed an armed man inside one of the huts, with directions to fire upon intruders...".⁹⁸

Curr further instructed the Aborigines Committee by offering an alternative approach towards the Aborigines, a course of action calculated to effect the cultural rather than physical destruction of the Aborigines:

...Whilst civilization of the natives is being attempted there is one consideration worth being attended to. Savages have quickly been civilized through the medium of their vices. If any one doubts this let him look back at the history of North and South

⁹⁴ Curr's submission to the Aborigines Committee AOT CSO 1/323/7578. Vol. 8. p.374

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.376

⁹⁶ Inward Despatch No.11. Curr to Directors. *op.cit.*, p.304

⁹⁷ Curr's submission to the Aborigines Committee. *op.cit.*, p.377

⁹⁸ Letter from Curr to Lee Archer. 10 August 1841. AOT VDL 23/10 BR LHC VDLC. p.296

America. The first part of this process has been to teach the Savages to drink and smoke. (I do not mean that this has been done systematically.) Occasional indulgences soon grow into a habit. When their supply is stopped they begin to consider how they can renew it, and they soon understand that they can only have their wants supplied, by giving on equivalents. Here is the first dawning of trade: they procure skins that they may barter them for spirits and Tobacco, and then the graduation from Drunkenness to Christianity even! is not very remote...⁹⁹

A comparison with Dawson's views on the same subject goes a long way towards explaining the very different relationship with the Aborigines achieved by the AACo.

...On the first occupation of a new country, civilized men have too frequently looked only to the easiest mode of securing the present services of the poor natives, by the temptation of ardent spirits, which have never failed to degrade uncivilized beings into half-civilized brutes...¹⁰⁰

The discord that existed between Curr and Goldie following the murder at Cooe Point was to cost Curr dearly, both in terms of his reputation within the colony and in support from his own officers. Goldie, in his correspondence with Arthur, had openly accused Curr of violence in his dealings with company servants and criminality in his treatment of Aborigines. In the same letter, Goldie accused Curr of hypocrisy in his promotion of two policies regarding the Aborigines. A public policy limited to the Cape Grim area - one that practiced the conciliatory measures preferred by the directors¹⁰¹ - and a different policy for the Hampshire and Surrey Hills where Curr had advised Goldie that he could have a free hand with the Aborigines. Goldie's reference to the existence of two VDL Co policies towards the Aborigines revealed

⁹⁹ Curr's submission to the Aborigines Committee. *op.cit.*, p.377

¹⁰⁰ Dawson, Robert. *op.cit.*, p.268

¹⁰¹ The Aboriginal tribes in that area were by now fragmented and posed no threat to the VDL Co following the Cape Grim massacre and other killings.

the process of dispossession taking place as well as its impact on the native population. Curr had little to fear from the remnants of those tribes located near the VDLC's coastal establishments¹⁰² and could afford to maintain a public display of tolerance and forbearance. In less than four years the Company's aggressive regime had reduced these once resilient tribes to a few scattered remnant hearth groups. Now no longer viable economic or social units, these small groups were forced to attach themselves to larger bands elsewhere or eke out a living on the fringes of European activity.

These dislocated Aboriginal family groups were also preoccupied with danger from another quarter. The breakdown of the tribal system had spawned a group of rogue Aborigines under the leadership of a Tommeginer woman named Walyer. After a rift with her tribe, Walyer, joined by her two brothers and two sisters ran away to live with the sealers. During their time with the sealers they acquired and learned the use of firearms, thus gaining inordinate power over the relatively defenceless Aboriginal families that still inhabited the coastal region.¹⁰³ As an outlaw from both communities, Walyer's band raided and killed black and white alike. Pevay, a member of the Parperloihener tribe, informed Robinson that "she was no good", and told how her band had speared "...plenty of people..." and "... when they want to kill other natives they sit down with them at their fires, enter into conversation with them and then come behind and kill them".¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² The Parperloihener, Pennemuker, Peerapper and Pendowte.

¹⁰³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, pp. 296 - 301.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 186 - 187.

Denied access to coastal food supplies by the VDL Co, those tribes that remained relatively intact in the hinterland had become increasingly reliant on traditional summer hunting grounds for their survival. This made the Hampshire and Surrey Hills region an area of major contention. For tribes without the option of retreat or relocation, dispossession meant certain extinction. It was in the context of Curr's campaign against these people that the Goldie incident took place, a period when Curr granted Goldie and his men a free hand to do as they wished. Elaborating on the latter situation, Goldie suggested that Curr had not only never entertained the idea of establishing peace in the Surrey Hills but had openly declared that "...it would be impossible to conciliate the natives there..."¹⁰⁵ Goldie went on to provide two examples of Curr's behaviour that he thought best illustrated his manager's 'true' nature. The first related to Curr's habit of standing by to personally witness men being flogged after he had sentenced them. As a surgeon was always present on these occasions, Goldie considered this an unusual and unnecessary practise, and put it down to his "...malicious and vindictive disposition..."¹⁰⁶ The second instance, which Goldie thought reflected poorly on a man of a magistrate's stature, involved a convict by the name of Turner, a servant in Curr's house. Goldie described the incident as follows:

...He was one day desired to scrub out a Room or some place by Mrs Curr which he refused to do. On Mr Curr being informed of his refusal he desired him to do it which he also refused, Mr Curr according to his own story, then seized him and endeavoured to throw him over large Iron Pot of warm water, but men of Turner's

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Goldie to Arthur. 18 November 1830. AOT CO 1/280/25 p.487

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.491

stamp being generally more expert at these matters, Mr Curr was soon hard on his back and left lying there...¹⁰⁷

In an attempt to discourage any retaliation on Curr's part, Goldie was quick to caution that he was able to do further damage if he wished "...I could give more instances in which you have expressed very different sentiments from those contained in your last letter..."¹⁰⁸ Goldie wasn't the only officer beginning to question Curr's authority; there was a marked deterioration in morale among the other VDL Co officers at this time, as well as a general lack of confidence in Curr's leadership. A striking illustration of the VDL Co officers' indifference to Curr's authority was that of George Robson's encounter with a group of runaway indentured servants held up by an impassable river. Robson allowed them to cling to his horse's mane while he forded them across, thereby enabling them to escape. When challenged over the incident, Robson protested that it was an act of humanity, as without his aid, they would have perished. Needless to say Curr was unimpressed.¹⁰⁹

Curr's deteriorating relationship with his officers was all the more serious from the point of view of company administration, as his relationship with indentured servants was also poor. The isolation of the establishment, relatively poor wages and conditions, as well as an authoritarian regime all militated to produce an environment of discontent. Runaway servants soon became a permanent feature of VDL Co labour culture. Despite the liability to six months imprisonment under the master and servants legislation, many of the disaffected servants chose to abscond. During 1832, twenty servants fled the establishment and successfully completed the difficult

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp.490 - 491

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Goldie to Curr 5 October 1829. *op.cit.*, p.481

¹⁰⁹ Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, pp. 29 - 30 see Inward Despatch. Curr to Directors. No. 239. 7 January 1833

journey to Launceston. In January of that year, Isaac Proud and John Barrett decided to run away because of their dissatisfaction with their rations. The quality and provision of rations had been a bitter source of complaint for some time, so it is of some interest that not far from the site of the Burghley hut one can still find a patch of garden mint planted by those early servants. Therefore, when Curr wrote of the Burghley flock in 1830 "...all the losses in that flock having been by Hyenas¹¹⁰ and a few from accidents..."¹¹¹ some of those 'accidents' may well have been a means of supplementing the rations with a Sunday roast.

However, of all the Europeans who made up the VDL Co establishment, it was the relatively powerless convicts who experienced the full harshness of Curr's regime. On the 19 January 1829, an assigned servant by the name of Richardson was listed for victuals with the VDL Co Store Department. Richardson's name appeared again on the 5 February with a note from Curr referring to him as Richardson the Flagellator, noting that he was now under the direct orders of himself as magistrate.¹¹² Now equipped with a full time flagellator, Curr made sure that the company made good use of him. During the period that Curr held the position of magistrate 51% of the convicts brought before him were flogged. The average percentage of convicts sentenced to be flogged by other magistrates in the colony during 1834 was only 11%, one fifth that ordered by Curr. Of those convicts assigned to the VDL Co during Curr's period on the bench, one in two were flogged, while the average elsewhere in the colony between 1830 - 1835 was one in four.¹¹³ Apart from Curr's faith in the

¹¹⁰ Tasmanian Tigers

¹¹¹ Inward Despatch No. 109. Curr to Directors. 6 January 1830. AOT VDL 23/3. para. 5

¹¹² Van Diemen's Land Company Memorandum Book. 1829 - 1842

¹¹³ Duxbury, Jennifer. *op.cit.*, p.11

lash, there was a practical reason behind the excessive employment of the flagellator. On the 2 November 1833, the VDL Co surgeon John Hutchinson gave some advice to Reeves that reveals the rationale behind the floggings as well as the perceived impartiality of Police Magistrate Mr. Alfred Horne:

...I should recommend you to prevail on Mr Horne to give those he may commit, to a severe flogging instead of sending them to the chain gang, as under the latter mode of punishment, you lose the services of the men, perhaps at a time when you can not well spare them...¹¹⁴

Curr in a very short period of time managed to initiate and maintain a hierarchy of violence, which in turn produced a climate of discontent that pervaded the establishment. The company officers were demoralised, Goldie and Fossey resigned, while Hellyer suicided. The indentured servants, treated as prisoners, eventually chose to escape, while the assigned servants who couldn't, were routinely flogged. In this context the original possessors of the land could expect little consideration or mercy, which is exactly what they received. Curr, who routinely exercised his power as magistrate to discipline his workforce, was unwilling to use that authority to protect the Aborigines, even those who no longer posed a threat to his establishment. There is little doubt that some Aborigines fell victim to individual VDL Co servants, who, brutalised at the lower levels of an authoritarian regime, were seeking scapegoats. Captain J.L. Stokes, while travelling in Van Diemen's Land met a shepherd who had once worked with the VDL Co, the man related how he had once been in charge of an Aboriginal women who had been caught stealing flour and tobacco from a VDL Co hut. Stokes then inquired how the man had obtained the woman's cooperation:

¹¹⁴ Letter from Hutchinson to Reeves. 2 November 1833. AOT VDL 23/6:BR LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 18/2, p.152

...the inhuman wretch confessed without a blush...that he kept the poor woman chained up like a wild beast; and whenever he wanted her to do anything, applied a burning stick, or firebrand snatched from the hearth to her skin...¹¹⁵

Robinson recorded some examples that were relayed to him by Aborigines during his first visit to the North West, such as the female Aborigine:

...kept by a stockkeeper for about a month, after which she was taken out and shot. Thomas, a man in the Company's employ, enticed some aborigines by holding up a large damper to them, and when one drew near he offered him a piece of bread on the end of a large knife and whilst the man was in the act of taking it off, he rushed forward and ripped him up...¹¹⁶

There are also some indications that more sinister methods were used in the killing of Aborigines. On the 8 August 1830, Robson, the superintendent of the Surrey Hills establishment, told Robinson how he had offered the men some poison to kill the Hyaena. The men had responded that they didn't need it at that time, but they would have a use for it next summer. Robinson was of the opinion that hundreds of Aborigines had been destroyed that way.¹¹⁷ In 1841 Curr wrote a rather anxious letter to his superintendent Adolphus Schayer on the subject:

...A report, resting on very good foundation I believe, that it was intended to get rid of the natives by leaving poisoned damper in the huts, having reached the Government, is the cause in my opinion, of this investigation being instituted...I beg you to communicate to me (and in a separate letter) any thing you may have heard connected with this topic...¹¹⁸

However, the greatest number, as Goldie charged, were methodically hunted down and killed by organised VDL Co hunting expeditions. As all of these incidents were

¹¹⁵ Dessailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.190 citing Stokes.J.L. *Discoveries in Australia in the Years 1837-43. Volume.2.* London. Boone. 1846. pp. 458 - 459

¹¹⁶ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.210

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.196

¹¹⁸ Letter from Curr to Schayer. 6 December 1841. see Bruce, Leslie. J. *op.cit.*, p.72

committed by men under Curr's control as manager, and lands within his jurisdiction as magistrate and therefore the de facto government representative, it exposes Curr to the charge of genocide. Out of the possible six to seven hundred Aborigines believed to have been living on the lands occupied by the VDL Co, by 1835 little more than one hundred or 15% had been identified as surviving the experience.¹¹⁹ Writers such as Justin Zeeman, who seek to absolve Curr of the crime of genocide,¹²⁰ conveniently gloss over the fate of the 85% Aborigines unaccounted for:

...As is commonly known, the ultimate fate of the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land, including those living on the lands taken over by the Van Diemen's Land Company, was their relocation to the Furneaux Group of islands...¹²¹

It is difficult to find any justification for the wholesale slaughter perpetrated on the North West tribes by the VDL Co. The Aborigines may have been a nuisance but certainly posed no serious threat to the company's activities. In the same year that Curr was advising the Aborigine's Committee that they must either "...submit to see the white inhabitants murdered one after another, or they must undertake a war of extermination..."¹²² he also wrote "...It would appear that they are a singularly imbecile race of beings, for with all the excellent chances they have had they have never yet succeeded in killing one of our people,¹²³ and they have attacked them in situations in which it would seem impossible that they could have escaped..."¹²⁴ The latter statement reveals a degree of racism and arrogance that precluded any possibility of his taking advantage of the peaceful nature of the North West people in

¹¹⁹ See Chapter Five for further details on the survivors.

¹²⁰ Zeeman, Justin. *op.cit.*, p.24

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.23

¹²² Curr's submission to the Aborigines Committee AOT CSO 1/323/7578. Vol. 8. p.376

¹²³ It is believed that three Europeans were eventually killed by Aborigines in the North West region. However, most attacks, particularly in the early stages of settlement appear to have been reprisals against specific Europeans in an attempt to maintain tribal law than outright acts of war.

¹²⁴ Inward Despatch No.109. Curr to Directors. 6 January 1830. AOT VDL 23/3. para.2

order to establish the kind of relationship favoured by his directors. In August 1829, after being pressed to establish friendly relations with local Aborigines, Curr did make one half hearted bid to appease his Directors. Curr reported to London that he had captured a youth he called "Thursday".

A youth, about 16 years of age, came voluntarily to some of our people who were in a boat on the isthmus. I have put him on board the *Friendship* for security where I intend him to remain until he knows at least enough of our language to be made to understand that we mean no hostility to his tribe.¹²⁵

Three months later Curr again mentioned his trophy "Thursday", though he was clearly tiring at the lack of response from the 'ungrateful little savage'. While reporting that Thursday was extremely intelligent and tractable, he also made mention that he was "incorrigibly idle" with a "cocky air".¹²⁶ By January of the following year, Curr had tired of playing the Samaritan and accordingly abandoned the project and released Thursday from his floating prison. Apart from that token effort, there is no record of Curr making any effort to institute a dialogue with the local chieftains, gain some familiarity with the local language and culture, or take any of the initiatives that Dawson adopted as a matter of course.

The incorporation of local Aboriginal communities into Company activities was clearly the strategy favoured and promoted by the VDL Co from London. By refusing to follow the course urged by his directors Curr was left with only two other alternatives with regard to the North West Aborigines, either to throw his resources behind the colonial administration's attempts to physically remove the Aborigines to the Bass Strait islands, or physically eliminate them. Individuals attached to the

¹²⁵ Inward Despatch No. 86. Curr to Directors. 13th August 1829. AOT VDL 5/1:

¹²⁶ Inward Despatch No. 100. Curr to Directors. 16th November 1829. AOT VDL 5/1. pp.. 209-210

Friendly Mission such as Robinson and his sons,¹²⁷ as well as Anthony Cottrell and Alexander McKay were all able to remove Aborigines from the North West region with varying degrees of success. However, there is no record of the VDL Co, notwithstanding its ready access to local resources and manpower, delivering even one Aborigine alive to the Friendly Mission, even though there was a bounty to be earned for doing so after 1830.¹²⁸ Apart from taking no initiatives of his own to remove the Aborigines, Curr offered little support to those who did. In 1831 Alexander McKay captured four Aboriginal men and one woman who had been attacking VDL Co stock and huts in the Surrey Hills district. The Government paid McKay his bounty of £25 and wages of £1 per week for his time on the expedition. Curr was subsequently asked by the administration to cover the cost of McKay's supplies, as it was the VDL Co who had directly benefited from McKay's endeavours. Curr responded by refusing to make any payment or contribution that would help defray McKay's expenses.¹²⁹

Curr's conspicuous lack of enthusiasm for the activities of the Friendly Mission indicates his reliance on the third option, the process of extermination. As Rosalie Hare reported, the company's men were openly expressing the wish "...to extirpate them entirely..." as early as 1828.¹³⁰ The intention to oversee the elimination of a race of people by Curr, a magistrate and representative of the Crown, was a crime that in modern parlance would be described as genocide. Article 2 of the *United Nations*

¹²⁷ George junior and Charles Robinson

¹²⁸ The Government Bounty was set at £5 for every adult and £2 for every child captured

¹²⁹ McKay, Thelma. *op.cit.*, p.74

¹³⁰ Hare, Rosalie. *op.cit.*, p.41

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as:

...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part...

While Curr was the chief instrument behind the destruction of the North West tribal people, he was not solely responsible for their demise. To take that position would be to adopt what E.H.Carr terms the "...Bad King John..."¹³¹ theory of history, and give Curr's personality central place in any explanation for the genocide.

The VDL Co itself must accept much of the responsibility for what was done on their land grants, in their name and by their representatives. The role of the colonial authorities will be examined in the next chapter. Though operating within the commonly accepted parameters of colonial exploitation, the directors were mindful of the effects of the process of dispossession, and the trauma and dislocation it would cause the original inhabitants. There were no endless plains or the distant frontiers of the mainland, behind which Aborigines could retreat in Van Diemen's Land. While successive despatches contained pious calls for the dispossession to take on a form that the directors in London could stomach, the same entrepreneurs took care not to precipitate any actions that could jeopardise company business.

The company's hope was that the indigenous population could be transformed into a ready reserve of a cheap local labour force. Apart from some examples of unofficial

¹³¹ Carr, E.H. *What Is History?* London. Penguin Books. 1990. p.45

exploitation that came perilously close to slavery, this prospect became increasingly remote. To Curr's limited understanding, labour that could be disciplined and driven was of more value and use than labour whose availability was dependent on negotiation. Accordingly, the fate of the Aborigines became less of a concern to the directors and a blind eye was turned towards Curr's excesses. As early as the Cape Grim massacre the directors had indicated their suspicions regarding Curr's behaviour despite his attempts at concealment, yet they expressed no condemnation. By 1830, Curr was able to openly reveal to the directors that he had once expressed a wish to his men to have three Aboriginal heads to place on the ridge of hut,¹³² presumably as some sort of deterrent, but again there was no censure. Even while the whole endeavour was coming apart at the seams, the directors continued to maintain their misplaced trust in Curr's abilities.

The winter of 1830 proved to be a disaster for the VDL Co as it demonstrated beyond any question that the Surrey and Hampshire Hills were unsuitable for wool production. Of the 5,500 high quality sheep taken there, only a few hundred survived. A further 1,000 died in the winter of 1832 and Tasmanian Tigers desperate for food took another 300.¹³³ Hellyer wrote of the experience:

...The snow is so deep that we are completely hemmed in by it. It forms such hard lumps on my overalls...that I was completely fettered by it and in the greatest pain imaginable. One hour of this weather would kill any man if he were stuck fast and remained inactive. The poor dogs were literally plated with coats of mail formed by

¹³² Inward Despatch No. 150. Curr to Directors. 7th October 1830. AOT VDL 5/1

¹³³ Pink, Kerry & Ebdon, Annette. *Beyond the Ramparts*. Hobart. Mercury - Walch. 1988 p.38

the ice on their hair, but they traveled better than we could, as the crust would support them ... The rams at Burghley had to be taken away, covered in blankets...¹³⁴

Curr was obliged to abandon the district and move the surviving sheep back to Circular Head in 1834.¹³⁵ Tensions developed between Curr and his directors as the VDL Co enterprise faced financial ruin and he was eventually dismissed in 1842.¹³⁶ The new agent, James Gibson, attempted to salvage the situation by leasing blocks of land to tenant farmers. This resulted in a small rush of settlers into the district in 1843, creating an acute shortage of accommodation.¹³⁷ In 1851 the directors decided to wind up their operations and they sold most of the land to newly arriving settlers as small farms, retaining a small holding at Woolnorth.¹³⁸ In the end, it was the initial grants of cheap land, eventually acquired at no cost, that produced the Company's only real profits. Profits acquired by selling off the land gained at the expense of the destruction of the North West Aborigines and the misery of those servants and convicts who toiled under Curr's regime.

¹³⁴ Mercer, Peter. *Burnie its History and Development*. Burnie. Advocate Printers (Burnie) Pty. Ltd. 1965. p.22 Curr's predicament gained little sympathy from the *Cornwall Chronicle* 19 March 1842, the paper informing the public that:

"...The removal of the late superintendent, Mr Curr, from the charge of the Circular Head establishment, has occasioned unusual joy amongst the community at that place:- the result will be no less beneficial to the affairs of the company, we trust, than pleasing to its' tenants and servants..."

¹³⁵ Mercer, Peter. *Gateway To Progress*. Hobart. Marine Board of Burnie. 1969 p.7

¹³⁶ Pink, Kerry & Ebdon, Annette. *op.cit.*, p.38

¹³⁷ Mercer, Peter. *Gateway To Progress*. *op.cit.*, p.9

¹³⁸ Pink, Kerry & Ebdon, Annette. *op.cit.*, p.36

Chapter Five

Colonial Administration



“Why Massa Gubernor” said Black Jack - “You Proclamation all gammon. How blackfellow read him eh! He no learn him read book” “Read that then”, said the Governor pointing to a Picture.¹ **Governor Davey's proclamation to the Aborigines, 1816.** (*National Library of Australia*)

¹ Apart from advancing the notion that Aborigines were now British citizens subject to the protection and penalties of British law, the above poster also implies a desire to see the two societies integrated. The poster is based on one of the original timber panels made at the direction of Governor George Arthur in 1829 and is wrongly attributed to Governor Davey.

The Friendly Mission's arrival in the North West region in early June 1830, was to mark the first official contact between the colonial administration and members of the North West tribes since settlement. The initial function of the Mission was simply to establish friendly relationships with previously uncontacted tribal Aborigines with the hope that these contacts would provide a basis for future reconciliation initiatives.² On the 1 December 1829, Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur granted George Augustus Robinson permission to organise an expedition to Port Davey "...to effect an amicable understanding with the aborigines in that quarter, and through them, with the tribes in the interior..."³ To assist the expedition, Arthur assigned two experienced bushmen the convicts Alexander McGeary and Alexander McKay together with a fourteen year old Aboriginal youth, Tim.me or Maulboy.hener, who was known to Europeans as Robert Timmy Jemmy Smallboy.⁴ Arthur also attached other Aborigines to the Mission including Truganini, Woorady, Black Tom (Kickerterpoller) and Eumarrah the chief of the Tyereer.note.panner Tribe (Stoney Creek tribe) of the North Midlands people. Eumarrah was a guerrilla fighter of some repute who had earlier been captured by Gilbert Robertson's roving band. When Robinson's party, now known as the Friendly Mission, finally set off for Port Davey on the 27 January 1830, it included some twelve to thirteen Aborigines and fourteen convicts. A group consisting of

² The initial decision to establish the Friendly Mission grew out of the deteriorating relationship between Europeans and Aborigines elsewhere in the colony. As the process of dispossession increased in tandem with the rapid expansion of the sheep population, so did the frequency and violence of encounters between settlers and Aborigines. The nature of this invasion gave the original inhabitants little choice but to resist in order to survive. Prior to Arthur's appointment, attempts by previous Governors to develop a constructive dialogue with the Aborigines had been thwarted, in part by mistreatment of the native population by escaped convicts and stock keepers. However, the increasing demand for native hunting grounds for pasture, as well as the continuing depredations of bushrangers, meant that relations with the Aborigines continued to worsen throughout Arthur's administration as it did through that of his predecessor Lieutenant Governor Sorell (1817 - 1824).

³ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.38

⁴ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?. op.cit.*, p.33

Robinson and eight Aborigines and five Europeans travelled overland, while the balance made their way by sea.⁵ The Aborigines in Robinson's party had little choice but to participate in the venture, their lands were occupied, their families mostly dead, and hostile roving parties were active throughout the midlands and north of the colony. Eumarrah, however, pleased to be out of jail made his escape once they were safely in the bush, much to Arthur's chagrin. Arthur had invested much of his own personal time and energies in an attempt to gain the trust and allegiance of Eumarrah. Nevertheless, these earnest overtures had little prospect of success, due in part to the hostile environment generated by the public hanging of Aborigines by Arthur's own administration.

Towards the end of Sorell's term of office, a band of detribalised Aborigines from the Oyster Bay region, known as the 'tame mob' had become frequent visitors to Hobart, often seen begging for tobacco and rum. Led by Mosquito, an Aboriginal convict⁶ from New South Wales, these visits progressively became more bold and aggressive, eventually leading to the killing of settlers. When Arthur arrived to take up his appointment as Lieutenant Governor in 1824, instances of Aboriginal armed resistance to European intrusions such as those organised by Mosquito had been uncommon occurrences, but were now clearly on the increase. Accordingly, Arthur made Mosquito's arrest a priority of his new administration by offering a reward for his arrest. After a number of skirmishes Mosquito was finally captured⁷ and, along with another Aboriginal known as Black Jack, charged with murder. Mosquito was

⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.114

⁶ Mosquito was transported to Van Diemen's Land for the murder of a woman in New South Wales.

⁷ Mosquito was tracked down by Teague, an Aboriginal boy raised by Dr. Luttrell.

found guilty⁸ and Black Jack was released after being judged innocent, only to be arrested a few months later and found guilty on another murder charge.⁹ Arthur dealt with the bushrangers in a similar manner, by issuing a Proclamation that offered a substantial reward for any prisoner giving information leading to their capture.¹⁰ In the case of the band headed by Matthew Brady, the reward amounted to one hundred guineas, or three hundred acres of land, free of all restrictions; or a free pardon and passage to England.¹¹ Needless to say, the scheme proved to be very successful.

Mosquito and Black Jack were eventually hanged along with six Europeans on 25 February 1825.¹² Their trials took place unassisted by counsel and only prosecution witnesses were called; no Aborigines gave evidence and there were doubts that they fully understood the proceedings. Gilbert Robertson is reported to have later told Chief Justice Pedder that he considered Mosquito's execution an act of "murder".¹³ The raids on outlying settlements and huts increased after the executions, and they also became more effective, as Aborigines gradually familiarised themselves with European weapons and habits. In an effort to defuse the situation Arthur encouraged Aborigines to come into the towns where they would be protected and provided with shelter and food. This gesture encouraged a number of offerings from well meaning citizens of ways and means to civilise and educate the Aborigines once

⁸ William Hollyoak at Grindstone Bay on 15 November 1823

⁹ Patrick McArthur see John West *op.cit.*, p.268

¹⁰ Sorell had earlier employed a similar scheme to successfully capture bushrangers including Michael Howe.

¹¹ Melville, Henry. *op.cit.*, pp. 54-55

¹² *Hobart Town Gazette*. 25 February 1825. Volume 10. No.460

¹³ West, John. *op.cit.*, p.624. note 23

out of the bush.¹⁴ In November 1824, a number of Oyster Bay people came in to Hobart and were conducted to Kangaroo Point (Bellerive) where they set up camp. The administration duly supplied the Aborigines with food and clothing and erected huts for their use.¹⁵ The Aborigines continued to make intermittent use of the camp until two of their number, Jack and Dick, were arrested and charged with the spearing and killing of Thomas Colley¹⁶ a stock keeper at Oyster Bay in May 1826.¹⁷ The case against Jack and Dick rested entirely on the testimony of convict stock keepers and it was a military jury that found them guilty. They were subsequently executed along with five Europeans in September 1826. Jack was reported as insisting on his innocence to the end.¹⁸ Although, unlike Mosquito and Black Jack they had the benefit of counsel¹⁹ and an interpreter to acquaint them with the nature of the testimony,²⁰ the trial raised some serious doubts regarding the legitimacy and fairness of the proceedings. Following the disquiet expressed over the conduct of the recent Mosquito trial, this case received a great deal of public scrutiny.

Bronwyn Desailly noted that in the period when European settlement was limited prior to 1825, Aborigines were described in a more sympathetic light that often invoked the theme of the noble savage. Then as the dispossession process accelerated, inherent racist views arose, and as settlers needed to justify their actions,

¹⁴ These schemes ranged from Schoolmasters offering to civilize parents via their children CSO 1/2/15 pp. 233-234 to phrenologists such as Paton offering a diagnosis of his young Aboriginal charge named Arthur Tasman in Arthur's honour CSO 1/2/15 15 October 1824.

¹⁵ West, John. *op.cit.*, p.271

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.625. Note 27. West offers information that Colley had flogged Jack on an earlier occasion.

¹⁷ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*. Vol.11. No. 541. 15 September 1826

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Counsel for the defendants was appointed by Chief Justice Pedder.

²⁰ Turnbull, Clive. *op.cit.*, p.68

Aborigines were portrayed as "...inherently barbaric, treacherous and savage..."²¹ However, another change in settler consciousness was also taking place, as Aboriginal resistance increased in intensity so did, albeit begrudgingly, recognition and respect for the Aborigines as a serious foe. This transition from children of nature to daunting figures of resistance brought with it some public acknowledgement that an invasion had indeed taken place, and perhaps the Aborigines and their tribes should be treated as prescribed by international law. The debate surrounding the trial of Jack and Dick illustrated this development clearly.

In keeping with many of these early trials involving indigenous people, the nature of the proceedings also brought into question and exposed as empty rhetoric the official dictum that Aborigines were British subjects protected by equal access to the common law. Although in some cases Aborigines were permitted to make statements that could be presented in Court, they were not allowed to give evidence from the witness box.²² In 1838, the New South Wales Attorney-General, Campbell, and Solicitor-General, Wilde, had advised that "...to admit in a criminal case the evidence of a witness acknowledging to be ignorant of God or a future state, would be contrary to the principles of British Jurisprudence".²³ If having an appreciation of the Judaic-Christian belief system was considered a necessary requirement for the giving of evidence, then Dick at least, should have been permitted to do so, as he was deemed worthy of receiving the Church of England sacrament prior to being hanged. This issue arose again in a later case where Pevay and Tim.me, Aborigines from Van

²¹ Dessailly, Bronwyn. *The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824 - 1836*, M.A. Thesis, University of Tasmania, 1977. p.iii

²² Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*. op.cit., p.109

²³ Roberts, Jan. *Jack of Cape Grim*. Richmond, Greenhouse Publications. 1986 p.83

Diemen's Land, were on trial at Port Phillip before Judge Willis in 1841. Neither of the defendants were permitted to give evidence, even though Robinson the Chief Protector of Aborigines had testified: "...they have a knowledge of the principles of religion and the existence of a supreme Being, and know right from wrong..."²⁴ The Society of Friends in London neatly summed up the injustice of the system:

...Christian laws will hang the Aborigines for violence done to Christians, but Christian laws will not protect them from the aggressions of nominal Christians, because Aborigines must give evidence only upon oath [which it is pretended that they are not sufficiently enlightened to be allowed to take]...²⁵

The other major issue, judged by many as an obstacle to the conduct of fair hearings, was the stipulation that Aborigines were not allowed to serve as jurors. In 1835 a New South Wales jury acquitted an Aboriginal man called Jack Congo Murrell on a charge of murdering another Aboriginal man. The *Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review* commented on the outcome:

We have already drawn the attention of the people to the injustice of subjecting the Aborigines of these Colonies to laws, of the very nature of which they are not only in the most perfect ignorance - but the subjecting them to be tried by Juries not their 'Peers,' is of itself a flagrant violation of those very laws themselves, under which every foreigner is entitled by express statute to be tried by a jury, one half of which are to be foreigners. Thus therefore, monstrously absurd as it is to subject the Aborigine to laws utterly incomprehensible to him, to try him legally under those laws he is entitled to a Jury of one half of his own countrymen. The Jury very sensibly got rid of the difficulty by acquitting the prisoner.²⁶

Captain George Grey, Governor of South Australia, reported that it was desirable that British law should supersede Aboriginal law the moment the latter became British

²⁴ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 24th December, 1841

²⁵ Aborigines Committee or The Meeting for Sufferings, *Further Information Respecting The Aborigines*, London, Harvey and Darton. 1842. p.12

²⁶ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. Hobart. 3rd June, 1836. p.182

subjects. Grey hoped that this would grant individual Aborigines protection against what he considered, the extreme punishments of their own laws, while at the same time undermining the function and authority of tribal elders. However, Grey identified a major obstacle that lay in the way of his proposal, arguing that:

...the natives are not tried by a jury of their peers, but by a jury having interests directly opposed to their own, and who can scarcely avoid being in some degree prejudiced against native offenders...²⁷

In the case of Jack and Dick, Andrew Bent writing in the *Colonial Times* did not limit his criticism to procedural issues, but questioned the legitimacy of the trial itself:

...We are aware of the legal dogma, that all persons on English land become subjected to English laws - Good! But as far as these poor wretches are concerned, it is not quite clear, that as relates to them it is English ground. It is true that formal possession has been taken of this country by the hoisting of the English flag, and by other mummeries of the same description. But what do these poor creatures know of this...It is wholly out of the argument to refer to their state, and that they are little better "*ferae naturae*" - that they have no laws! that very doctrine itself says abundance against the system now adopted as to them; because, if indeed they are so degraded in the scale of humanity, surely it would almost be as just to subject any other description of wild animal to the operation of British law!²⁸

Bent, an ardent opponent of the colonial administration, went on, after referring to Vattel and Grotius as authorities on international law, to draw the provocative conclusion:

...how did we obtain possession of the land. For we repeat, if by conquest, the conquerors became subject to the territorial laws of the conquered...

Arthur, however, maintained some hope that the executions would serve the function of dissuading the "... commission of similar atrocities by the Aborigines...". Also, in

²⁷ Aborigines Committee or The Meeting for Sufferings. *op.cit.*, pp. 28 - 29

²⁸ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*. Vol.11. No. 526. 2 June 1826

an attempt to maintain at least the appearance of equality before the law, Arthur warned that anyone found guilty of injuring the Aborigines would incur "... the severest penalties which the law may prescribe ... without the slightest interposition of mercy..."²⁹ The latter threat reinforced an earlier proclamation issued by Arthur shortly after arriving in Van Diemen's Land:

...The Natives of this island being under the protection of the same laws which protect the settlers, every violation of those laws in the persons or property of the Natives shall be visited with the same punishment as though committed on the person or property of any settler...³⁰

However, as Melville was later to observe, the legal system failed the Aborigines as "...not one single individual was ever brought to a Court of Justice, for offences committed against these harmless creatures..."³¹ Melville also pointed out that execution was a strange way to bring about conciliation, while death in battle was something the Aborigines could understand, the reasoning behind executions on the scaffold was beyond their comprehension. He went on to argue that Arthur's carefully worded proclamation was meaningless because of the breakdown in communications, meaning in essence that the only message delivered to the Aborigines was the deaths of Jack and Dick. So as a consequence, Aboriginal attacks on settlers increased sharply following the executions.

Less than two months after the executions, the *Colonial Times* reported two attacks on settlers by no less than 200 to 230 Aborigines. These raids resulted in the destruction of property and stock, as well as one confirmed European death and

²⁹ Turnbull, Clive. *op.cit.*, pp. 69 -70

³⁰ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p.19. Proclamation of 23 June 1824

³¹ Melville, Henry. *op.cit.*, p.59

possibly two others.³² This new spate of attacks was considered all the more dangerous as they were led by Black Tom,³³ an Aborigine raised from childhood by Europeans and who, it was feared, was in a position to train his companions in the use of European weapons and provide valuable tactical advice. One week later, the paper reported Black Tom leading 300 Aborigines on a raid that killed one European while other Aboriginal raids killed a further eight.³⁴ While the *Colonial Times* continued to reason that the Government should use every means possible to put a stop to these raids "...without shedding blood if possible..." there was little sympathy for Black Tom who, after apprehension, the paper argued, should be "...immediately gibbeted on the very spot, which has been the scene of his atrocities..."³⁵ With the imminent capture of Black Tom becoming more unlikely by the day, the *Colonial Times* warned that:

...the natives are no longer afraid of a white man now that they know how a gun is fired off, it is useless [*sic*]. From attacking Stock-keepers, they now attack huts...They have ceased to fear, and learn to abhor. They look upon the white men, as robbing them of their land, depriving them of their subsistence, and in too many instances, violating their persons...³⁶

Predicting an inevitable spiral of violence, the article went on to pressure Arthur's administration:

...We make no pompous display of Philantrophy - we say unequivocally, SELF DEFENCE IS THE FIRST LAW OF NATURE. THE GOVERNMENT MUST

³² *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*. Vol.11. No. 549. 10 November 1826

³³ Kick.er.ter.poller also known as Tom Birch

³⁴ The further eight dead claimed by the paper was an exaggeration it was later to compelled to retract, however the story illustrates the climate of alarm sweeping the colony.

³⁵ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*. Vol.11. No. 550. 17 November 1826

³⁶ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*. Vol.11. No. 552. 1 December 1826

REMOVE THE NATIVES - IF NOT, THEY WILL BE HUNTED DOWN LIKE
WILD BEASTS, AND DESTROYED.³⁷

The editor concluded that the authorities had few choices, the first priority being the settlers' security, the second - proper protection for the natives. The solution offered in the article involved the removal of the Aborigines guilty of the raids to either the Australian mainland or to King Island. The call for the expulsion of Aborigines was becoming more frequent, the removal of the entire population of Aborigines to the Australian mainland had already been canvassed by Thomas Anstey, the Police Magistrate at Oatlands in 1825.³⁸

Black Tom³⁹ was eventually captured in November 1827 by Gilbert Robertson⁴⁰ the Chief Constable at Richmond. Despite the capture of Black Tom, Aboriginal resistance continued to hinder the settlement and development of the colony. Arthur responded by issuing a Proclamation on 15 April 1828, that in effect divided the Colony into separate regions for Aborigines and Europeans, the borders defined and

³⁷ *ibid.*,

³⁸ Dessailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.28

³⁹ Black Tom's raids also blunted any hopes that Roderic O'Connor the Land Commissioner may have had for future coexistence with the Aborigines. O'Connor wrote to Arthur, expressing his doubts regarding the chances of attaining a peaceful reconciliation:

It is a melancholy fact that the few who have been civilized have invariably returned to their Tribe and have been the foremost in all the murders that have been committed. Black Tom was raised by Miss Birch now Mrs. Hodgson, and when on the point of being sent to Macquarie Harbour for inciting his companions to murder at Oyster Bay, was restored to liberty by her interference. He, it was who last year murdered Mr Simpson's Man --- while in the act of giving him and his companions, Bread, the unfortunate man having declared to that effect before his death, knowing him well, as they had lived together for two years. How then is it possible to conciliate those who become more brutal in proportion to the kindness shown them. Nothing but fear operates on such Savages. see Letter from Roderic O'Connor to W.T.Parramore (Secretary to Arthur) AOT.CSO. 11 December 1827

⁴⁰ Robertson, Gilbert a West Indian born in Trinidad emigrated to VDL in 1822 where as Chief Constable at Richmond he led roving parties to capture Aborigines in 1829 and 1830. Dismissed from the police force in 1832 he became editor of a number of Newspapers that included the *True Colonist*.

guarded by military posts.⁴¹ Aborigines found to be within European designated zones were to be captured, without force if possible, and then persuaded to relocate to their own prescribed area. Arthur took great care to make sure that his proclamation wasn't misinterpreted⁴² as official approval for settlers and stock keepers to mount unrestrained attacks upon the Aborigines:

...any unauthorized act of aggression or violence committed on the person or property of an Aboriginal shall be punished as hereinbefore declared; and all Aborigines are hereby invited and exhorted to inform and complain, to some constituted authority, of any such misconduct or ill-treatment, in order to its coercion and punishment.⁴³

Arthur's decision met with the immediate approval of editor of *The Tasmanian* who, after acknowledging that the Aborigines were indeed a people entitled to the benefit of the "...full latitude of the *Law of Nations*...", suggested that in addition to assigning land to the Aborigines, an agricultural enterprise and school should be established to aid in their further civilisation.⁴⁴ Pedder, made a more realistic assessment regarding the effect of the proclamation and warned of its inherent dangers, noting that the:

...object of this Proclamation is their expulsion wherever they may appear in the settled districts and however harmlessly they may be considering themselves. The means are to be by showing a force of soldiers and armed inhabitants. If unhappily the show of force should prove ineffectual then the force must act.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, pp. 22 -23

⁴² The picture board used to illustrate the beginning of this chapter (wrongly attributed to Davy's) was one of a series that were hung on trees as part of Arthur's strategy to communicate his peaceful intentions to the Aborigines.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.24

⁴⁴ *The Tasmanian*. Volume II, No.67 6 June 1828

⁴⁵ Dessailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.28

Arthur had also further complicated matters by making provision in his proclamation for the annual migrations undertaken by the Aborigines, movements necessary to take advantage of seasonal food supplies.

...Nothing herein contained shall prevent the Aborigines from travelling annually, (according to their custom), until their habits shall have been rendered more regular and settled, through the cultivated or occupied parts of the island to the sea coast, in quest of shell-fish for sustenance...⁴⁶

A system of passports was proposed to facilitate the safe movement of Aborigines through the settled districts. The elements set in place by the proclamation appeared to work through the ensuing winter, but the arrival of spring brought a new spate of attacks from the Oyster Bay and Big River tribes. The public clamour for Government action to contain Aboriginal attacks finally led Arthur to proclaim martial law in November 1828, a measure that was in effect a declaration of war that lasted for three years. The decision meant that any Aborigines venturing into the declared settled districts could be legally shot. However, the state of martial law provided little protection, and twenty two settlers were killed in the Oatlands district alone during the first two months of the laws proclamation.⁴⁷ Melville was critical of both proclamations, the first was ridiculed for dividing the Aborigines' country with imaginary boundaries "...over which these ignorant creatures were not allowed to step without a passport..."⁴⁸ Martial law was condemned on the basis that:

...the boundaries fixed were of a most extraordinary nature, and embraced a vast portion of the Island, over which the natives were prohibited from trespassing. When it is recollected that, within ten or fifteen miles of Hobart Town, the country is yet

⁴⁶ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p.24

⁴⁷ Department of Education and The Arts, Tasmania. *Resistance. Book Two*. Hobart, Department of Education and The Arts, 1990. p.16

⁴⁸ Melville, Henry. *op.cit.*, p.78

unexplored, the cruelty of this sweeping proclamation, by which these poor creatures were expelled from their own soil, may be more readily imagined by the stranger...⁴⁹

Flawed as these schemes were, Arthur considered that they provided a better option than expelling the Aborigines to an island in Bass Strait as many were urging.⁵⁰ Arthur argued that this "...would be an aggravation of their injuries..." and, after being banished altogether from their favourite haunts and land they would be "...ill-disposed to receive instruction from their oppressors, any attempt to civilise them, under such circumstances must consequently fail..."⁵¹

In addition to the declaration of martial law, the government established several roving parties, each consisting of five convicts and a police constable to be deployed in an attempt to capture Aborigines in the bush. Robertson's roving party provided a model by using Black Tom to assist in the capture of Eumarrah, an Aboriginal chief who had been mounting successful raids against European outposts. Eumarrah would have been destined for the hangman but for the actions of Robertson, who had some sympathy and understanding of the Aborigines' position as an invaded people. Robertson intervened on Eumarrah's behalf, saving him from execution by arguing strongly before the Chief Justice that his captive was in effect a Prisoner of War.⁵² Other parties led by Jorgensen and later John Batman met with mixed success, the number of their prisoners "...lamentably disproportionated to the many that

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.78

⁵⁰ *The Hobart Town Gazette*, Vol.II. No.549, 11 November 1826. In a strongly worded article that ascribed to the Aborigines "treachery and a vindictive spirit" argued that the removal of these "ferocious tribes" to an island in the straits was a measure that would enjoy wide support in the Colony.

⁵¹ Levy, M.C.I. *op.cit.*, p.107 Arthur to Goderich 10 January 1828

⁵² Turnbull, Clive. *op.cit.*, p.97

perished..."⁵³ John Batman headed a party that managed to capture a single woman and child after killing fifteen men, and was rewarded with 2,000 acres of land for his trouble.⁵⁴

In April 1828, Arthur established a ration station on Bruny Island in the hope that the regular provision of biscuits, potatoes and blankets would lure Aborigines from the settled districts.⁵⁵ However, by the end of 1829 the combination of respiratory ailments, replacement of the traditional diet with convict rations⁵⁶, European clothes and habitation had inflicted a dramatic toll on the station's population. Within a few months of Robinson's arrival all but five⁵⁷ of the fifty Aborigines had perished, leading to an abandonment of the settlement.⁵⁸ Thus in January 1830, only nine months after assuming control of the Mission, Robinson was setting off up the West Coast in charge of the Friendly Mission with its message of conciliation.

⁵³ West, John. *op.cit.*, p.279

⁵⁴ Turnbull, Clive. *op.cit.*, p.98

⁵⁵ On the 9 May 1828, *The Tasmanian* was able to report that "...A considerable tribe has been collected...at Brune Island, where they behave with great confidence and friendship...". It was not long before the success of the station made it an obvious choice as a destination for those Aborigines captured by the roving parties. Arthur, decided to take advantage of the situation to conduct a conciliation experiment at the station. Accordingly, a Government Notice was issued on the 7 March 1829, offering £50 per annum, together with rations to a "...steady person of good character...". In 1829 Robinson, a lay preacher and builder was appointed head of the settlement and plans were made to build a village with a school in it and to teach the Aborigines to become farmers. The numbers at the mission were further boosted with other captured Aborigines and some seasonal visitors from Port Davey.

⁵⁶ Convict rations contained salt meat unpalatable to Aborigines.

⁵⁷ The Nuenone people had been reduced to Woorady, the last adult male, his three children and his new wife Truganini some twenty years his junior.

⁵⁸ Department of Education and The Arts, Tasmania. *Living with the Land. Book Four*. Hobart, Department of Education and The Arts, 1990. p.7

On the 25 February 1830, shortly after Robinson had commenced his journey, the Aborigines Committee⁵⁹ recommended a reward should be offered for the capture of live Aborigines. The bounty consisted of £5 for every adult and £2 for every child taken alive. The Committee had recently been appointed by Arthur to take submissions from the general public and to make recommendations on measures to be adopted towards the Aborigines. By March, a number of submissions were received by the Committee, these ranged from the extreme: - Curr's submission that the problem would finally be resolved by "...the extermination of the weaker race..."⁶⁰ to the simplistic:- suggestions that Spanish Bloodhounds be imported to track the Aborigines down. There were also some radical schemes being considered in New South Wales at the time, as an extract of a letter from Mr. McDonald of the Commissariat Department to his father Major McDonald reveals:

...The influence. I possessed over the natives, did not of course pass unnoticed in the Colony: and it was officially represented to the Governor on two or three occasions by the Commandant of the Settlement; at one time, it was the intention of the Government to have sent a Tribe of Port Macquarie Blacks in conjunction with a strong military force to attack the natives of Van Diemen's Land, who have been committing great ravages there for some time past; and I was then strongly recommended to the Governor to be appointed to accompany the expedition; but the intention was afterwards abandoned...⁶¹

In the meantime, oblivious to the deliberations of the Aborigines Committee in Hobart, Robinson's expedition had slowly inched its way along the West coast, making successful contact with the Port Davey Aborigines in March and entering the

⁵⁹ The Committee consisted of: Archdeacon Broughton, Rev. W. Bedford, Rev. J. Norman, P.A. Mulgrave, Esq., Jocelyn Thomas, Esq., James Scott, Esq., Samuel Hill, Esq., Charles Arthur, Esq.

⁶⁰ Curr's submission to the Aborigines Committee AOT CSO 1/323/7578. Vol. 8. p.376

⁶¹ *Historical Records of Australia. Series I, Volume XVI.* Canberra, The Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament. 1923. pp. 447 - 448

North West region in May.⁶² On June 12, a number of Aborigines were sighted near Mount Cameron West, but neither Robinson nor his Aboriginal guides were able to establish any contact with them.⁶³ Finally, after a difficult journey of nearly six months, Robinson's party met up with a shepherd employed by the VDL Co., and were later offered hospitality by surveyor Joseph Fossey⁶⁴ at Cape Grim. Robinson, took advantage of this respite to set about the exploration of the Company holdings accompanied by Truganini and Woorrady. Robinson was also keen to conduct unofficial inquiries on behalf of Arthur regarding the treatment of Aborigines by the VDL Co., particularly the veracity of the report of the Cape Grim massacre made by Goldie the previous year.⁶⁵ After obtaining details of the massacre from Chamberlain, Robinson's group came upon a small sealer's camp situated on Robbins Island. McKay knew most of the sealers from his time when employed as VDL Co. boatman. There were four sealers⁶⁶ together with six females and one male Aborigine; five of the females were from the eastern tribes. Robinson warned the sealers that the government was aware of the aggressions committed by them on the Aboriginal population and of their practice of shooting Aboriginal men in order to steal their women.⁶⁷ After being assured that this was not how these particular women were obtained, Robinson decided to leave the women with the sealers but with

⁶² Robinson's party arrived at the Pieman River on 23 May 1830

⁶³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.174. Robinson noted that the Aborigines at Mount Cameron were mistrustful of Europeans and that they took great care to keep out of Musket ball range. These Aborigines could only have learned of the power and use of these weapons from previous experiences with employees of the VDL Co..

⁶⁴ Alexander McKay knew Fossey quite well having assisted in the exploration of the adjacent coastline with Fossey and Hellyer in 1827.

⁶⁵ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal op.cit.*, p.4

⁶⁶ John Witieye, Robert Drew, David Kelly and Edward Hanson a half caste.

⁶⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.180

the caution that should he hear of any further outrages against the Aborigines, the offender would be brought before a "... judicial court and tried for his life...".⁶⁸ The sealers were also warned that they must dispose of their dogs and to cease their traffic in kangaroo skins as this was depriving Aborigines of their means of subsistence. Whilst with the sealers, Robinson discovered that Truganini and Woorady were able to converse with the sealers' women as they were from the east of Van Diemen's Land. This communication provided Robinson with a detailed account of the Cape Grim massacre and the events leading up to it from an Aboriginal perspective. The Aboriginal male with the sealers proved to be a boy called Pevay or Tunnerminerwait, a member of the local Parperloihener tribe who was just visiting the camp. Robinson, in need of an Aborigine who could speak the local language, invited Pevay (who had the additional advantage of speaking English) to accompany the Mission on its journey.

The day after Pevay joined the Mission, campfire smoke was sighted on Robbins Island, prompting Robinson to organise a return visit. Soon after landing, Pevay located his younger brother Pendowtewer, in company with an Aboriginal female Narrucker and her young daughter. Narrucker was a Peerapper woman who was joined to the Parperloihener tribe by marriage, but her husband Wore.re.wan.er was now dead.⁶⁹ After some negotiation this small band also reluctantly agreed to attach themselves to Robinson's party.⁷⁰ Like Pevay, their options were limited, there was little hope or security to be expected from marauding sealers or the men of the VDL Co. who were determined to drive them from their lands. Even living in an area free

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 180

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, Note.117. p.233

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 184

of the roving parties was no guarantee of survival because there was also the added problem of a rogue Aboriginal band that presented a constant threat to whites and blacks alike.⁷¹

Leaving Woolnorth at Cape Grim on the 25 June, Robinson arrived at Circular Head on the 12 July. After introducing himself to Edward Curr and his family, Robinson was handed mail that had been awaiting his arrival. In a letter from his wife he learned that while he was journeying up the West coast, the Government had introduced a bounty for captured Aborigines.⁷² Robinson, eager to profit from the news, lost no time in immediately despatching a boat back to Robbins Island to secure some unsuspecting Aborigines. The boat returned with two males Line.mer.rin.nec.er and one of Pevay's old friends Nicermenic. Line.mer.rin.nec.er, Pendowtewer, Narrucker and her daughter were then sent on ahead by ship to Emu Bay. When Robinson's party joined them in August, Nicermenic was added to their number, and with the expectation of a £20 bounty, Robinson embarked them on the *Friendship* bound for Launceston.⁷³ To Pevay this must have appeared as an act of betrayal, undermining any trust that he may have had in Robinson. After sending Pevay's brother and best friend into captivity, Robinson noted: "...The affection of these people is very striking - the vessel on weighing anchor caught a breeze and was soon distant, Tun.ner.min.ner.wait (Pevay) keeping a long and wistful eye upon her and bursting into tears..."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Walyer and her band

⁷² Turnbull, Clive. *op.cit.*, p.96

⁷³ Plomley regarded this action as the beginning of Robinson's commercialism in relation to his work among the Aborigines see Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.234. note.123

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 191 -192

With the exception of Pevay and his friends, Robinson found little evidence in his journey through the VDL Co. lands of the North West tribes that had once dominated the landscape. Although Robinson wouldn't have expected to meet large numbers of Aborigines along the coast in winter, the fact that he met none is an indictment of the sort of treatment meted out to the Aborigines by Curr and his employees during their short four years of occupation. However, Robinson did record some signs of Aboriginal activity; recent firestick farming was observed while crossing Rocky Cape, as were some small Aboriginal camp sites and a hut near Table Cape. After the departure of the *Friendship*, Robinson, in search of further Aboriginal contact, decided on a detour that took his party inland to visit the VDL Co. establishments at the Surrey and Hampshire Hills. Here he availed himself of the opportunity to preach to Company employees before continuing his journey to Launceston. The visit provided Pevay, whose English skills had improved considerably,⁷⁵ with an opportunity to hear first hand from VDL Co. staff of European attitudes towards his people. Captain Robson informed Robinson of his concerns regarding the use of poison in flour, while Henry Hellyer related how a stockkeeper called Paddy Heagon had shot nineteen of the western Aborigines with a swivel gun charged with nails.⁷⁶

On the party's return to Emu Bay, Pevay received the more cheerful news that three of the four Aborigines sent to Launceston had been returned to Cape Grim and had immediately absconded; only Nicermenic had been forwarded to Hobart. Robinson, far from sharing Pevay's delight, was furious with the authorities who had deprived him of his bounty money.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.203

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.197

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 208 - 209

As the Mission members continued their journey to Launceston they came across Walyer's village on the 20 September, just after crossing the Rubicon River near Port Sorell. The fires were still burning and it was obvious that Walyer's band was still in the vicinity. Soon they saw eight men identified by Pevay as members of Walyer's band. Pevay, Truganini and Mutteellee were sent forward to make contact with them whilst Robinson remained in the rear. The warriors, alarmed by their unexpected visitors, made ready to spear the Mission blacks who sensibly made a hasty retreat. Later Robinson sent Pevay forward a second time to make contact. On this occasion he succeeded in facilitating an uneasy truce. Robinson was to make the empty boast in his journal that had the Government not sent back those people he had forwarded to Launceston he could have captured "...the whole of the tribe...".⁷⁸ Robinson didn't explain exactly how he would have achieved this feat, but his bounty money would have been well earned had he accomplished it. The next day Pevay, having had enough of Robinson and the Friendly Mission, stole away during the night with two young companions and headed back to his own country, anxious to rejoin his brother and Narrucker.⁷⁹

Pevay and his companions, unarmed and vulnerable outside their own country, hadn't gone far before they were attacked by an armed party from Walyer's band. They made their escape by swimming back across the Mersey River to seek refuge at Captain Smith's hut. Captain Smith then handed them over to the authorities to be escorted to Launceston jail under military guard. Pevay had ample time to consider his position whilst incarcerated in prison. He had no future in his own country with

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 215 - 216

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.220

Walyer and VDL Co. employees at large, and it was difficult to get there in any case with the Roving Parties patrolling the North. The situation was even becoming dangerous within the boundaries of Launceston as the popular press were stirring public feeling against the Aborigines on the eve of the Black Line.⁸⁰ In short, there was little Pevay could do except await the arrival of Robinson and again agree to participate in the Mission until other opportunities presented themselves.

When the Mission finally arrived in Launceston in early October the atmosphere generated by martial law and preparations for the Black Line was such that Robinson had some difficulty in protecting the Mission Aborigines from the town rabble.⁸¹ He used the tense situation to impress upon the Aborigines in the party that their only safety lay in his presence, using fear to increase their dependence.⁸² Robinson then visited Pevay in jail and satisfied himself that he was willing to continue with the Mission. He noted in his journal that Pevay had received cruel treatment whilst incarcerated.⁸³ After arranging for Pevay's release, Robinson rode south for an interview with Arthur who had travelled to Perth to supervise the operation of the Black Line.

The Black Line was an ambitious and desperate attempt by the Administration to clear Aborigines from the settled areas. The scheme, which contained many of the features proposed in Murray's submission to the Aborigines Committee, involved drawing up an armed line of soldiers, constables and settlers that would sweep south from

⁸⁰ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.61

⁸¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.243

⁸² Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.62

⁸³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.242

Campbell Town driving the Aborigines into the Tasman Peninsula. The operation commenced on the 7 October and finished some six weeks later. Having deployed some 5,000 men and expending £30,000 this extravagant folly yielded Arthur the miserable prize of two Aborigines, a man and a boy.⁸⁴

Most of the Aborigines had little trouble in passing through the line undetected, however this massive show of strength did impress upon them the growing vulnerability of their position. Arthur was able to report that:

...there is reason to believe, from the comparative forbearance which the savages have since observed, that the late decisive operations of the Government, and of the community generally, have had the effect of deterring them in a great measure from their usual aggressions...⁸⁵

The line therefore assisted Robinson, for demoralised Aborigines were more likely to place their trust in his promises and the offers of the protection of the Friendly Mission.⁸⁶ Robinson played no part in the Black Line as Arthur had ordered him to conciliate a large tribe that was believed to inhabit the Cape Portland area in the North East. After locating the tribe, he was instructed to send for John Batman and his party to assist in their capture if he thought it necessary.⁸⁷ Robinson also planned to liberate the Aboriginal women from the sealers whilst in the area.

On the 9 October 1830, with Pevay now out of jail, the Friendly Mission, together with a convict escort party, and James Parish acting as coxswain left Launceston for

⁸⁴ West, John. *op.cit.*, pp. 295 - 300

⁸⁵ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p. 47. Arthur to Murray. 1 January 1831

⁸⁶ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.66

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.63

Georgetown and the North East. One group travelled in whaleboats, while Pevay's group - led by Robinson - went on foot. After trudging through the bush for nearly three weeks they came upon a group of seven Aborigines on the coast near Swan Island. Robinson soon induced them to follow him 'to safety' on Swan Island by filling the Aborigines with fear regarding the conduct of the soldiers of the Black Line.⁸⁸ A party was then organised to visit the sealers living on the other nine islands in the vicinity. The expedition returned with three Aboriginal women, one of whom was Too.ger.nup.per.too.ten.ner the sister of a local chief and renowned 'clever man' called Mannalargenna. On the 15 November, refugees and stragglers from the Black Line and Roving Parties also started to arrive along the coast and made smoke in order to be taken over to Swan Island in the hope of sanctuary. Prominent among the new arrivals was Mannalargenna who had made his way to the coast to rejoin his people. Believing they were now safe from harm, there was much dancing and singing as people from different bands were reunited with their brethren. Robinson busied himself organising the convicts to erect cottages and the framework of a temporary establishment. Meanwhile, Parish took the longboat to Cape Barren Island in search of more Aboriginal women; he returned nine days later with a further six females. By the middle of December there were 33 Aborigines at the Swan Island settlement, a considerably better result for the Friendly Mission than that achieved by the Black Line. Consequently, when Robinson returned to Hobart in January, he was able to profit from his newly acquired reputation as the "supreme authority on Aboriginal matters".⁸⁹ Robinson received an increase in salary to £250 a year, backdated to his appointment in 1829, a gratuity of £100 and a land grant of

⁸⁸ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.64

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 67 -68

2,500 Acres free of restrictions.⁹⁰ The Committee was also pleased to note that Robinson expressed confidence in being able to effect the voluntary removal "...of the entire black population, which he is of opinion is not more than 700 in number, in the course of two or three years..."⁹¹ Robinson's recent successes meant that the Committee had to make both long and short term plans on setting up establishments to cope with the Aborigines already detained on Swan Island, as well as any further Aborigines brought in by the Friendly Mission. After due deliberation, the Committee came to a unanimous decision in recommending Gun Carriage Island (now Vansittart Island) as the most suitable place to set up an establishment. Robinson gave his support to the Committee's decision and recommended that the Aborigines now on Swan Island be removed there. The Committee initially accepted his recommendation as well as his proposal to conciliate and remove the remainder of the Aborigines in the Colony to this site on the islands. Robinson justified his support for the removal of Aborigines to the islands by arguing that they:

...would not feel themselves imprisoned there, or pine away in consequence of the restraint, nor would they wish to return to the main land, or regret their inability to hunt and roam about in the manner they had previously done on this island. They would be enabled to fish, dance, sing, and throw spears, and amuse themselves in their usual way...⁹²

Although the Committee accepted Robinson's support for Gun Carriage Island, it was acknowledged in their minutes that his first preference was Maria Island, but was dissuaded from this option as he thought it difficult to prevent escape. The argument for Maria Island was strongly supported by Captain George William Jackson, Master

⁹⁰ Arthur's letter to Sir George Murray, 4th April 1831 AOT CSO 1/280/28 Reel. 247. pp. 416-425

⁹¹ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p. 76

⁹² *ibid.*, p.81

of the Cutter *Charlotte*, a mariner who had some practical knowledge of the conditions surrounding the Bass Strait islands. Jackson wrote to the Committee warning of the dangers and difficulty of access to the islands in the Straits, arguing that:

...Maria Island, which (in my opinion as well as that of Mr Robinson's) is the only place adapted for an Establishment - the means of escape might easily be prevented by establishing a row Guard upon Lachlan's Island - and as the Cutter is to be attached to that Establishment, she might be stationed at the mouth of Spring Bay, where she has an open view of the sea to the southward and to the Northward of Maria Island, as well as being able to attend to the row guard. With such precaution I think it would be impossible of their ever being able to make an escape...⁹³

However, the Chief Justice John Pedder opposed the exile of Aborigines to any of the islands, and put it to Arthur that before he make a decision on the matter, the feasibility of making a treaty with some of the tribal chiefs should be explored. A treaty that would allow their tribes to remain on the mainland if the chiefs would agree to remain behind agreed boundaries. As part of the treaty Pedder suggested that:

...that it should be proposed to them to allow an European agent to reside with or accompany each tribe...such agents would most materially contribute to maintain any amicable engagement of this sort which might be concluded. Up to the present moment, when aggressions had been made upon the Natives, they have not known to whom to complain, nor, had they known, could their evidence have been used to bring the offenders to justice: such agents would serve the double purpose of protecting the Natives on the one hand, and of checking any disposition towards hostility on their part on the other; and they would be constantly and usefully employed in endeavouring to reclaim the Natives from their savage state....⁹⁴

⁹³ Letter from Captain Jackson to the Aborigines Committee. 18 June 1831. AOT CSO 1/323/7578. Vol. 8. pp. 14 -15.

⁹⁴ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p. 82. Minutes of the Executive Council, 23 February 1831

Pedder also took the opportunity to make his personal position on the matter abundantly clear by stating that:

...he could not recommend the adoption of measures tending to induce Natives, in tribes, to consent to expatriation and imprisonment, until the absolute necessity of such measures was clearly manifested; for, notwithstanding Mr. Robinson's opinion to the contrary, that, however carefully these people might be supplied with food, they would soon begin to pine away when they found their situation one of hopeless imprisonment...⁹⁵

During further discussions with Robinson, Arthur was advised that Aboriginal tribes occupying the West coast from Cape Grim to Port Davey⁹⁶ were able to be conciliated, that a suitable person should be sent bearing gifts of blankets, tea and sugar and that they should be strictly protected from molestation by Europeans.⁹⁷ Accordingly, Arthur proposed that such an embassy be sent to the West coast tribes with appropriate gifts, while those Aborigines presently on Swan island be removed to an appropriate island in Bass Strait - along with the Aboriginal women yet to be taken from the sealers on adjacent islands.⁹⁸ Arthur then issued the following instructions:

That Mr. Robinson, with any other persons who are inclined to afford their services in co-operation, should make another effort to confer with the hostile tribes, and explain the humane and kind disposition of the government towards them, with the assistance of such Natives as may be depended upon, and, if possible, negotiate with their chiefs either to proceed to the establishment, or to bind themselves to commit no further

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.82

⁹⁶ This group of tribes included all of the North West tribes with the exception of the Tommeginers of Table Cape. Robinson further stated that as there were no settlers in the region the only Europeans to molest these Aborigines were escaped convicts from Macquarie Harbour, Sealers and servants of the VDL Co..

⁹⁷ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p. 83. Minutes of the Executive Council, 14 March 1831

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.84

outrage on the condition of receiving food and clothing and protection from all aggression...⁹⁹

It was thus left to Robinson to offer a choice to the Aborigines, a position he energetically opposed, an opposition in no small part due to a desire to protect his authority, position and the income derived from it. Robinson had argued that an agreement with the tribes was pointless as "...the Chiefs have but little influence over their Tribes..." and that he did not "...think he could deter them from committing fresh atrocities, or that any dependence could be placed in their observance of any treaty, even if they could be induced to enter into it..."¹⁰⁰ A strange argument from Robinson, who relied upon the authority of chieftains and their, at times, naive acceptance of his assurances and word as a primary means of control.¹⁰¹ Even more difficult to understand is Robinson's confidence that the Aborigines would be content and happy on their Bass Strait island prison, with no regrets on losing their "...ability to hunt and roam about in the manner they had previously done..."¹⁰²

The choice of Maria Island may have offered more basis for optimism. Possessing a moderate climate, over 20 kilometers long and 13 kilometers wide at its widest point it had sufficient land and game to enable Aborigines to maintain their traditional life style. It was also land with which the Aborigines were familiar, being the home of the Tyred-deme people, one of the Oyster Bay tribes. Robinson's personal experience of the rapid demise of Aborigines at the Bruny Island Mission should have been sufficient to inhibit the making of such fanciful predictions. Arthur, mindful of the

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.84

¹⁰⁰ Arthur's letter to Sir George Murray, 4th April 1831 *op.cit.*, pp. 422-423

¹⁰¹ see pages 173-4 for arrangements entered into with Mannalargenna, and pages 184-5 for an example of Wymeruck's misplaced trust in Robinson's agreements.

¹⁰² Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p. 81

disastrous precedent set by Bruny Island, was well aware of the fate of Aborigines removed to such a situation. In a letter to Murray he admitted privately, that in some respects he was inclined to agree with the removal policy for:

...even if they should pine away in the manner that the Chief Justice apprehends, it is better that they should meet with their death in that way, whilst every act of kindness is manifested towards them, than that they should fall a sacrifice to the inevitable consequences of their continued acts of outrage upon the white inhabitants...¹⁰³

One of the local newspapers was of the same mind as Pedder and had no doubts as to the outcome of expulsion:

One word as to Mr. Robinson...we are entirely opposed to the Flinders Island system, which we consider to be extravagantly expensive - extremely cruel - and wholly fruitless, unless with a view to the extermination of those hapless beings, the Aborigines, which, if that is the object, as it would seem to be, it would surely be much more humane to effect it by *fusilading* them at once, rather than send them to pine away in lingering death...¹⁰⁴

Robinson was sent back to Swan Island to arrange the transfer to Gun Carriage Island and then to make contact with, and conciliate, the Big River Tribe. Robinson had no intention of offering the Aborigines the choice recommended by Arthur. However, in order to enlist the aid of Mannalargenna, he made a promise that closely mirrored Pedder's proposals for a treaty. On the 6 August 1831, Robinson reported to the Colonial Secretary that he had taken great pains to impress upon all the natives in the service that:

...provided their countrymen would only be pacific and desist from their wonted outrages that a person would be sent amongst them as a protector who would accompany them in their migratory excursions, that they could follow their usual

¹⁰³ Arthur's letter to Sir George Murray, 4th April 1831 AOT CSO 1/280/28 Reel. 247. pp.. 423-424

¹⁰⁴ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. 27 April 1837. p.112. AOT SLTX/AO/NP/461

recreations and they would be allowed food and clothing and would receive other encouragement's.¹⁰⁵

There is no record of Robinson taking any further steps or measures to either honour or implement the agreement.

Arthur and Pedder's desire to resist the option of expulsion and enter into a treaty with the Aborigines indicates an official acceptance that Europeans had indeed invaded Aboriginal lands, a position also taken by *The Tasmanian* in 1828 when reversing earlier editorial support for the expulsion of the Aborigines:

...our former proposition is quite erroneous being at variance with equity, and the *Law of Nations*, as they must to all intents and purposes be considered a people, and real proprietors of the land and therefore out of the power of Government to remove them, except as prisoners of war, or by treaty with their respective chiefs...¹⁰⁶

It is clear that under International law the Aboriginal tribes of Van Diemen's Land, with their well defined and defended tribal boundaries, and under the authority of their chieftains, were nations in their own right, Vattel observing that:

...Nations or States are political bodies, societies of men who have united together and combined their forces, in order to procure their mutual welfare and security...¹⁰⁷

The acceptance of the application of International law by the Executive of the colony should come as no surprise for, as Henry Reynolds pointed out, the British did not consider Van Diemen's Land to be *terra nullius* when they decided to colonise the island.¹⁰⁸ Aboriginal habitation was well documented by earlier English explorers,

¹⁰⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.468. Note. 239

¹⁰⁶ *The Tasmanian*. 30 May 1828. Volume II. No.66

¹⁰⁷ Vattel de Emer. *op.cit.*, p.3

¹⁰⁸ Reynolds, Henry. *Fate of a Free People, op.cit.*, p.124

and the French had undertaken extensive anthropological studies during their own expeditions. Attempts to treat the Aborigines as British subjects and bring about peace by the implementation of British law had proven to be both ineffective and inappropriate: the declaration of martial law in itself was a public admission of that failure. The real state of affairs existing between the settlers and Aborigines was that of war.¹⁰⁹ With no military or legal solution to the problem in sight, the Friendly Mission was Arthur's final hope for achieving his goal of a negotiated peace with the Aborigines. Unfortunately, he chose a poor emissary in Robinson.

After arranging the transfer to Gun Carriage Island, Robinson assembled the Friendly Mission together with Mannalargenna at Campbelltown on 15 October 1831, in preparation for his next expedition, the conciliation of the Big River Tribe. While Robinson was thus employed, Alexander McKay who had recently left his service was engaged by the Aborigines Committee to conciliate Aborigines to the "...Westward and in which direction his search will be confined in order that he may not interfere with Mr. Robinson's proceedings..."¹¹⁰ McKay set off in late August, accompanied by an Aboriginal guide known as Black Sal.¹¹¹ After being detained in the search for the Aborigines responsible for the killing of Captain Thomas and overseer James Parker near Port Sorell, McKay made his way to the VDL Co. establishment at the Hampshire Hills. McKay had picked up an additional Aboriginal guide en route, a woman called Mongareepitta. George Robson, the superintendent of the establishment, welcomed McKay's arrival, having just returned from mounting an attack on some Aborigines who had speared to death Abraham, one of the company

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.111

¹¹⁰ McKay, Thelma. *op.cit.*, p.61

¹¹¹ Aboriginal name Kar.ne.butcher native of Campbelltown district.

servants. Robson immediately placed two assigned servants, Thomas Ward and William Wells, under McKay's command and sent him out in pursuit of the Aborigines. Robson kept Curr apprised of the situation, Curr duly informing Arthur that the Aborigines at large numbered around twelve, were probably from the Ouse district, and were believed to be the same party that murdered Thomas and Parker.¹¹² Curr's next report advised that McKay had captured two men, a woman and a child.¹¹³ McKay duly arrived with his captives in Launceston on the 19 November where they were placed in gaol "...for safe keeping...".¹¹⁴ Curr, who had taken the group to Launceston on board the *Fanny*, wrote to the Aborigines Committee to advise them that an Aborigine had been "...sacrificed in an attempt to parley with a tribe...".¹¹⁵ After reporting that the Big River tribe, under the command of Montpeliatter, was active in the Surrey Hills area, Curr requested that McKay be allocated four men to go back where he was confident of "...taking some considerable number of natives...".¹¹⁶ The Committee agreed with Curr's request and sent McKay and four convicts¹¹⁷ armed with pistols back to the VDL Co. lands, under the following conditions:

...The Committee recommend the strongest directions be given to McKay to abstain from all acts of unnecessary violence and that in the event of his meeting Mr. Robinson he should put himself under his orders, at the same time information should

¹¹² McKay, Thelma. *op.cit.*, p.68

¹¹³ The Aborigines taken by McKay were Pendowtewer (Pevay's brother from Robbins Island), Wore.ken.na (female) known as Kitty, Troul.lun.ny (boy), as well as two old men Tar.hap.he [Tarabee] and Kar.ly.man.ly [Kalia].

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.69

¹¹⁵ Curr to the Aborigines Committee. 19 November 1831. CSO/492/10852. pp. 229 - 232

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 229 - 232

¹¹⁷ Including one assigned servant supplied by the VDL Co.

be immediately sent to Mr. Robinson that such orders have been given in consequence of what has happened to Westward...¹¹⁸

Early in January 1832, Robinson arrived in Hobart with the remnants of the Big River and Oyster Bay tribes. These once numerous tribes were now reduced - by war, privation and the roving bands - to sixteen men, nine women and one child. Ever a self publicist, Robinson took the opportunity to parade his prizes in front of Government House. Flushed with his new found celebrity status, he boasted in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, John Burnett the secret of his success, 'guile'. He had "...promised them [the Aborigines] an interview with the Lieutenant-governor, and told them that the Government will be sure to redress all their grievances".¹¹⁹

Calder was to note that after hearing Robinson's assurances:

...they gave in without one other word, and followed him rejoicingly to Hobart Town, a hundred miles from the scene of their surrender; from whence, instead of having their grievances redressed, whatever they were, they were immediately consigned to the barren solitude's of Flinder's Island...¹²⁰

Once in Hobart, Robinson, jealous of potential rivals,¹²¹ urged that McKay and his party be recalled from their mission. The Aborigines Committee met on 25 January and decided to recall McKay immediately and his services were "...dispensed with in compliance to a communication made by Mr. Robinson..."¹²²

¹¹⁸ McKay, Thelma. *op.cit.*, p.70

¹¹⁹ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p. 82

¹²⁰ Calder, J.E. *op.cit.*, p.23

¹²¹ Robinson took every opportunity to disparage McGeary's abilities for the same reason. On a later occasion after criticising McKay and complaining that the entire affairs of the Aborigines should be under his exclusive control Robinson wrote "...Another proof of the inutility of a Committee to interfere with a service of which they were ignorant, was to be met with in the case of McGeary. A more useless fellow there could not be and yet the Committee thought fit to reward him in a lavish manner..." Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.607

¹²² McKay, Thelma. *op.cit.*, p.74

In the wake of his success, Robinson was contracted in early February to conciliate those Aborigines still at large in the West and North West under the following conditions: Robinson was to receive a reward of £100 for bringing in the Big River tribe. He would receive £1,000 for conciliating the Aborigines to the Westward. A generous pension plan would be provided for his wife and children in the event of his death. On the conclusion of his mission he was to be appointed superintendent of the Aboriginal establishment.¹²³ During Robinson's stay in Hobart from January to mid-February 1832, the Aboriginal settlement on Gun Carriage Island had been relocated to The Lagoons on Great (Flinders) Island and placed from 1 March 1832 under the control of Lieutenant William Darling. On the 4 April the newly assembled Friendly Mission was ready to leave Launceston for the West Coast; the party now included Anthony Cottrell¹²⁴ with some Sydney Aborigines. Robinson also took along Mannalargenna and his wife, though the reason for this is not clear. The Mission was venturing into territory unknown to Mannalargenna, taking him amongst tribes he could not communicate with¹²⁵ while exposing him to the dangers associated with traditional tribal hostilities. It may have been that to have sent Mannalargenna and his wife into exile on Flinders Island would have exposed the emptiness of Robinson's earlier assurances that the chief would be allowed to remain on his land. For Mannalargenna's part, he had little choice but to come along and assist. He also nurtured some hopes that Robinson would rescue his daughter Wobbelty¹²⁶ who had been abducted by the sealer John Thomas.

¹²³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.588

¹²⁴ A man highly thought of by the Quakers, Backhouse and Walker.

¹²⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.620

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.611 also Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 833

The Mission made its way along the North West coast, and nearing the VDL Co. establishment at Circular Head, camped on the west side of the Black River. During the following day, while the Aborigines were hunting game, Woorady met two VDL Co. servants out riding. On being questioned, Woorady informed them that there were other natives present and they were under the control of Robinson. That night while the encampment slept, it was attacked by a large party of VDL Co. employees. Robinson recorded the event:

...the encampment was suddenly attacked by an armed party of about thirteen or fourteen men who rushed impetuously upon the encampment, vociferating very opprobrious epithets and calling out to each other, "here they are, here they are; cut away, cut away"...As they drew near the natives called out, "Mr R, Mr R, plenty white people coming, plenty muskets". I challenged them, but they did not answer and rushed upon the camp in a most violent and outrageous manner. I expected nothing else than to be shot. The natives fled to me for protection. I rose from my bed and advanced to them. When they saw me they did not desist from their abuse, and they pointed a gun at my servant and threatened to shoot him...¹²⁷

Robinson was of the opinion that if it were not a moonlit night, which made his tent and horse clearly visible, the raid would have had a more lethal outcome. However, the raid, based upon intelligence gained earlier that day from Woorady, was calculated and consciously targeted. There is little doubt it was a clumsy attempt by some VDL Co. employees to intimidate a government agent, whose investigations and reports from the previous visit had brought unwelcome attention to their activities. Curr's compliance in the attack must be accepted, as it is difficult to believe that fourteen men could mount a nightly expedition of this nature from Circular Head with any hope of keeping it secret.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p.606

After spending a few days at Circular Head, the Mission travelled on to Cape Grim following further tensions between Robinson and Curr, this time regarding availability of stores. On arriving in Pevay's country near the Welcome River, Robinson's journal entry noted that Mannalargenna had prophesied that he, Robinson would be killed on this expedition while at the Arthur River.¹²⁸ The following day Pevay encountered some of his people including two of his brothers, Penderoin and the chief Wymurrick and family. After some discussion with Robinson, Wymurrick, from his isolated and beleaguered situation, was more than happy to accept the protection of the Mission. The meeting however, was not without incident. Mannalargenna, in fear of Wymurrick, had tried to hide the latter's spears. Wymurrick, discovering Mannalargenna's actions, seized hold of the spears and it was only through the timely intervention of Robinson and Pevay that Mannalargenna's life was spared.¹²⁹ After spending some time with Wymurrick and his people on Hunter Island, Robinson gathered the Mission together and set off for the Arthur River on the 28 August. One day's march from the Arthur River the party made camp in the woods, then the next morning they set off to make contact with the Tarkiner Band. However, Mannalargenna chose to remain behind in the camp.¹³⁰

An advance party of the Mission Aborigines that included Tim.me, Truganini, Woorryady and Penderoin was sent off across the river, while Robinson, who couldn't swim, awaited the construction of a raft before following. Robinson's group eventually crossed the River and settled down to await developments. They had barely made camp when the advance party returned with twenty-nine Aborigines

¹²⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p. 619

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, p.622

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 646

including some Port Davey people. For once Robinson was meeting in the bush an Aboriginal group who had some first hand knowledge of his background and motives.

Dray, a woman who had travelled with the Mission from Bruny Island and remained with her people at Port Davey had ample time to relate the fate of Aborigines at that establishment. There were some familiar faces present, for Pevay at least: his sister Pordeboic, her husband a Tarkiner named Pade.de.vene.he.noke and their child Noring.bake. Also amongst the group was Narrucker with her daughter, whom Robinson had sent to Launceston from Robbins Island, only to be immediately released by the authorities. Narrucker recounted the physical abuse she had suffered at the hands of white people on the journey there and on the way back. Narrucker also informed Pevay how, in his absence, his brother Pendowtewer had been captured and cruelly treated by McKay.¹³¹ As a consequence of Pendowtewer's subsequent exile to Flinders Island, his wife Lawerick was also taking refuge with the group.¹³² It would appear that Robinson's decision to have McKay's party recalled, no matter what the motive, was a fortuitous one for the Aborigines. Narrucker's information confirmed the fact that McKay and his men had killed two Aboriginal men and two Aboriginal women in their attack near the Surrey Hills; not the single Aboriginal claimed.¹³³ As the parties settled in for the night, Pade.de.vene.he.noke warned

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p. 648

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 648

¹³³ Robinson had learned of the true nature of the attack from Aborigines on Flinders Island some months after the event and informed the Colonial Secretary:

...I learnt also that the four natives brought in by McKay were not among those that speared the Company's messenger,...It would appear...that as soon as the natives had returned to rest, the party by a preconceived measure seized upon this opportunity for an attack, and instantly fired upon their encampment. At the same moment rushing upon and attacking them with the butt end of their pieces, three aborigines were shot dead...they then seized upon one boy, two men and woman and made them captives... see Dessailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.207

When Curr made his initial report to the Colonial Secretary on the 4 November, he made no mention of any deaths, only that McKay had taken some prisoners. Later on the 18 November, Curr gave further support to McKay's actions by informing the secretary of the

Pevay to stay awake and keep watch as there would be an attack. Robinson overheard the conversation and, alarmed by the few words he understood, asked Pevay if the Tarkiner Chief Wyne was friendly towards them. Pevay assured him that he was. Robinson didn't believe Pevay and assumed he had not understood the question. Robinson's journal details the events of the next day.¹³⁴ In the morning as Wyne's people prepared to attack, Robinson's party instantly fled, leaving Robinson to fend for himself. Robinson wisely ran after Truganini, determined not to lose sight of her. She made for the river not knowing she was pursued, then, as Robinson noted, she was greatly alarmed on seeing him catch up. Truganini urged him to hide in the bush and lied that the Tarkiners had already killed Woorradly, Pevay and the others. Robinson's journal recorded the faltering tone of that message. Truganini then said that if he would remain behind, she would swim across the river and tell Mannalargenna what had happened. Even Robinson had enough respect for Aboriginal bush craft to see the folly of that advice, considering it suicide to attempt to hide from them in their own country. After binding some spars of wood together for flotation he insisted that Truganini push him across the River to safety. On crossing the river they made their way to the original crossing point where they met up with the other members of the Mission who had apparently escaped from Wyne completely unharmed, a remarkable feat considering the Aborigines' dexterity with the spear.

Aborigines Committee that three of the Aborigines killed were those that murdered Abraham, whilst the fourth was unavoidably sacrificed in an attempt to parley with the tribe. Curr, obviously preferred McKay's methods to those of the Friendly Mission, offering full support to McKay's future expeditions. Curr's enthusiasm is not surprising, as the two VDL Co. servants assigned to McKay would have been familiar with previous company raids against the Aborigines and would, no doubt, have followed well tried tactics.

¹³⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, pp. 650 - 652

No doubt with this knowledge in mind, Robinson looked back to the other shore and saw three of the Mission blacks casually walking over a hill and Pevay's sister and husband collecting a dog that Penderoin had left behind for them. Pevay met up with Robinson and attempted to reassure him that both he and his brother tried to protect him once the attack had commenced. However, Robinson had some nagging doubts. He noted that as Wyne had earlier opened his knapsack and taken one blanket, it appeared strange that Pevay was now in possession of the remainder of the contents "...for if he had influence sufficient to prevent them from taking those things he must necessarily have had influence to prevent the attack".¹³⁵ Nevertheless Robinson proceeded to write a long and dramatic account of the whole incident emphasising his own calmness and bravery in the face of certain death and how the loyal and ever faithful Truganini had saved his life.¹³⁶

A more probable explanation of the events is that Pevay, with some assistance from Truganini, had reasoned that as the Tarkiners, his people, were occupying the only free land left in the colony there was a possibility that once over the Arthur River they could gain their liberty. The visit also provided an opportunity to rid themselves of Robinson with no blame attached to either them or the rest of the Mission Aborigines should things go wrong. This also explains Mannalargenna's reluctance to go to the Arthur River as well as his amazing powers of prophesy. If Robinson had regarded the Aborigines with a little more respect, he would have recognised it as a subtle warning of what was being planned. Unlike the Mission Aborigines, Mannalargenna probably still had some hope that Robinson would honour their initial agreement.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 654

¹³⁶ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p. 92

Pevay and Penderoin¹³⁷ had now little choice but to continue as part of the Friendly Mission. Robinson was still alive, and one brother, Pendowtewer, was captive on Flinders Island while his wife, Lawerick was under the control of the Mission. The other brother, Wymeruck and family, remained isolated on Hunter Island.

Having survived the plot to kill him, Robinson now returned to Hunter Island with his party and joined Wymeruck and his people. The numbers of the group, now approximately fifty, exceeded the local food supply, and food rations soon ran short. Lawerick, who had been in poor health, grew worse, and on her eventual death was ritually cremated by her people. Robinson thought it prudent not to interfere with the ceremony.¹³⁸ With his charges now secure on Hunter Island, Robinson decided to pay Curr a visit at his house "Highfield". Robinson's arrival at Circular Head coincided with that of the Quakers Backhouse and Walker who were making their own study of Aboriginal conditions. During their short stay, the visitors had the opportunity to witness the sort of everyday brutality that marked Curr's regime. On the 2 November a Company employee received 50 lashes for some misdemeanour while on another occasion Curr assaulted the convict Peart, breaking his collarbone for attempting an escape.¹³⁹ Two other convicts each received 25 lashes for possessing alcohol.¹⁴⁰ Unable to control the growing dissatisfaction back in his own camp Robinson arranged with Curr for the *Charlotte* anchored at Circular Head to deport the Aborigines held captive on Hunter Island to Flinders Island. Robinson was concerned that if the *Friendship* was used for the task, Wymeruck would attempt an escape

¹³⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.652

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 658

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 677

¹⁴⁰ Backhouse, James. *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies*. London. Hamilton, Adams, and Co.. 1843. p.108

when it called into Circular Head to unload shell.¹⁴¹ Aware of the future that these people faced in captivity, Robinson admitted to Curr that he was unwilling to face them at the moment of their deportation.¹⁴²

The Mission Aborigines were then ordered south by Robinson. They were to make their way on foot to Macquarie Harbour under the leadership of Anthony Cottrell, who had recently been appointed to the Aboriginal Service, and await him there. Satisfied with having brought another thirty Aborigines into captivity, Robinson went on to Hobart for an extended rest. On the 15 March 1833, Robinson, with some prompting from Arthur, embarked on the *Tamar* and sailed to rejoin the Mission. During his absence, Cottrell had captured seven Aborigines on his journey south and held them on Grummet Island in Macquarie Harbour.¹⁴³

On Robinson's arrival, Cottrell proceeded with his charges to Flinders Island, leaving Robinson in charge. Robinson was in no mood to tarry in Macquarie Harbour as he needed to conclude his business with the remainder of the Western Tribes in order to secure his prize money. This time the convicts in his party brandished their guns openly whereas in the past they had concealed them. With the monetary prize nearly in his grasp, Robinson was not prepared to take any chances. Within twelve days of his rejoining the Mission, the smoke of a small group of the Port Davey people was sighted. Keen to mop up the last remaining Aborigines, Robinson dropped the pretence of conciliation, admitting that, for his part at least, it had only ever been a convenient strategy:

¹⁴¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.696. note.117

¹⁴² Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p. 92

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p.93

When I first undertook the work of conciliation it would at once have annihilated my scheme had I in the slightest degree used restraint, but the work now is different and the case is completely altered. All tribes with the exception of these are removed, and it is a satisfaction to know that their removal is for their own good.¹⁴⁴

Robinson ordered the white men of the party to uncover their weapons and file off on each side of the Port Davey people in order to bring them in. On the 5 June, Robinson sent his first new shipment of captives off to Flinders Island on the *Shamrock* and then organised a pursuit of those still remaining in the bush. On the 17 June the Mission made contact with seven Aborigines that included Dray her husband De.woo.rade.dy and the Chief Towterer. While returning them to Macquarie Harbour for shipment to Flinders Island De.woo.rade.dy refused to go. Robinson immediately ordered a convict to threaten him with a gun for he was not prepared "to be trifled with".¹⁴⁵ Robinson was also personally prepared to use force to achieve his objectives at this time, making reference in his journal to: "... having a small pistol in my pocket which I had carried to intimidate the natives..."¹⁴⁶

Robinson had now completed his metamorphosis from evangelical conciliator to commercial opportunist, and in this guise there was no room for sentiment or misplaced tolerance. The final expedition set out from Macquarie Harbour on the 22 July and captured a further nine members of Pevay's people; these were remnants of the Tarkiners under the leadership of the old chief Wyne. Wyne tried to resist capture by attacking those Aborigines from other tribes who were assisting Robinson. He first tried to spear Tim.me and when Mannalargenna went to Tim.me's aid, he

¹⁴⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.725

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 743

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 729

seized Mannalargenna's spear and tried to break it over his head.¹⁴⁷ Finally overcome, the Tarkiners were forced to make the difficult trip back to Macquarie Harbour. Here they were locked up in the convict gaol, a situation that Robinson thought was well adapted for Aborigines. Confined and frightened, they were placed on the lower floor of the gaol where they were subject to the torment of convicts on the upper floor. After enduring incessant hammering on the ceiling and the convicts pouring water and urinating on them, they quickly succumbed to illness.¹⁴⁸ Within eighteen days Wyne and his family were dead, leaving only two survivors from the last nine captured. Wyne had tried to break down the door before falling too ill to resist any further and died on 31 July. On the 2 August, Pene.ne.bope died from falling on rocks in a state of delirium; he was followed by his wife, who mourning her loss, died on the 5 August. Wyne's widow Naydip gave birth to a little girl on the 10 August; the baby died later in the day and Naydip died the following day. Surrounded and engulfed by so much death, many of the mourning women complained to Robinson that they were desperately unhappy. Robinson recorded that on one occasion he had inadvertently asked why they cried? To this Dray retorted: "Why was blackman's wife not to cry as well as white man's?"¹⁴⁹

After a short but fruitless search for another small party of Aborigines still at large near Circular Head, Robinson embarked with the fourteen Aboriginal members of the Mission on the *Tamar* bound for Hobart. In March and April 1834 the Mission, again in the North West, captured another twenty Tarkiner including Pevay's sister Pordeboic, her husband and child. On the 7 April, they followed the path of a band of

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 764

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 771

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 771

Tommeginers, until the Mission blacks discovered sharpened stakes driven into the ground for the purpose of wounding would-be pursuers.¹⁵⁰ Shortly after the abandonment of this pursuit, the Mission Aborigines began to show signs of rebellion.

Robinson noted in June that Mannalargenna had lied to him by identifying Aboriginal smoke as fog, while earlier in the same day Penderoin brought two kangaroo into the camp and refused to share them with him.¹⁵¹ With the enthusiasm dampened and only a handful of Aboriginal stragglers remaining in the bush, Robinson left his son George jun. in charge while he returned to Hobart.¹⁵² On the 28 December 1834 George jun., now accompanied by his brother Charles, came across a small band of frightened and desperate Aborigines near Black Bluff.¹⁵³ Apart from a family picked up later near the Arthur River, (the Lanney family) these were thought at the time, wrongly as later events proved, to be the last remaining tribal group on the Tasmanian mainland.¹⁵⁴

John West, reflecting on the situation, wrote that "...it was indeed a mournful spectacle: the last Tasmanian quitting the shores of his ancestors..."¹⁵⁵ He also added "...It would be difficult, however, to believe Mr. Robinson was not satirical, when he wrote as follows:-

¹⁵⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.875

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 890

¹⁵² Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p. 99

¹⁵³ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.170

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 101

¹⁵⁵ West, John. *op.cit.*, p.310

The system adopted toward the aborigines of this territory is quite original. History does not furnish an instance, where a whole nation has been removed by so MILD AND HUMANE A POLICY!¹⁵⁶

Calder, well aware of the options offered by Robinson wrote that "...it was an awful day for the natives when they trusted the good faith of the Government, which seized them as prisoners directly they got them, and consigned them to the Straits islands, where in a dozen years or so, four-fifths of them died..."¹⁵⁷

Officially there were no Aborigines now left in Van Diemen's Land; the process of dispossession was complete. Arthur, for one, was not content with the outcome, regarding exile as a poor option and regretting the fact that a treaty was not "...entered into with the Natives..."¹⁵⁸ Throughout the pressures of the Black War, Arthur consistently advanced policies that would retain an Aboriginal presence within the Colony, resisting all arguments favouring exile. Although the colonial authorities, unlike Curr, and despite much advice to the contrary, took great pains to avoid unnecessary harm to the Aborigines, the final result in both areas of administration was almost the same. Much of the responsibility for the final outcome, being as bad as it was - total dispossession and exile for the Aborigines - must rest with Robinson. Had he not disregarded the expressed wishes of Pedder and Arthur, and seriously given the tribes the option of remaining on the mainland, the tragedy of Flinders Island could well have been minimised. In the case of the West Coast Aborigines,

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 310

¹⁵⁷ Calder., J.E. *op.cit.*, p.63

¹⁵⁸ Arthur to Hay. 24 September 1832. AOT CO 280/35 see also Reynolds, Henry. *Fate of a Free People. op.cit.*, p.122 In 1835 Arthur wrote to the Colonial Office that it was a "...great oversight that a treaty was not, at that time, made with the natives and such compensation given to the chiefs as they would have deemed a fair equivalent for what they had surrendered..."

Robinsons' greed¹⁵⁹ led him to disregard the assurance he gave the Executive Council, that there are tribes:

...to the westward who have never been at war with the whites, and who would gladly receive government agents to reside amongst them, to instruct and protect them...¹⁶⁰

Alexander McGeary was later to publicly criticise Robinson's decision to take those "...peaceable and harmless creatures near Macquarie Harbour..."¹⁶¹ into captivity, as they "...were of no annoyance to any person..." living in an area where there were no inhabitants to disturb. This missed opportunity is all the more tragic, as most of the land occupied by the West Coast tribes still remains vacant today, the Macquarie Harbour Penal Settlement being abandoned by Europeans only four months after their removal.¹⁶² Robinson also showed his disdain for the wishes of the Executive Council by resorting to the use of armed convicts to take the West Coast tribes by force. The use of armed force to capture and imprison Aborigines was a flagrant breach of Arthur's specific orders, that the Natives "...were to be encouraged to proceed with their own consent..."¹⁶³

Robinson's devotion to his own self interest was not a new phenomenon; his very public displays of evangelical zeal had always helped cloak his activities from scrutiny as well as assist in the cultivation of influential friends. In 1829 when the alarming mortality rate among the Bruny Island Aborigines made it clear that the Mission's days were numbered, Robinson was quick to make good use of his evangelical

¹⁵⁹ Robinson was to receive £1,000 on the completion of his mission. see Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.588.

¹⁶⁰ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p.81

¹⁶¹ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. 21 April 1837 p.129. AOT SLTX/AO/NP/461

¹⁶² Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.151

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.83

contacts to secure the next stage of his career. Taking note of Gilbert Robertson's early success in capturing Aborigines by utilising the assistance of other Aborigines as trackers and mediators, Robinson decided to adapt Robertson's plans for his own purposes. Robinson had acquired some familiarity with the West Coast people who were not at war with Europeans during their visits to the Bruny Island Mission, an experience that made the West coast an obvious area to commence his activities. With little time to lose, Robinson set about gaining the support of the colonial chaplain William Bedford¹⁶⁴ and another Anglican Chaplain James Norman. These were men of considerable influence in the young colony, both receiving appointments to the Aborigines Committee. Supporting Robinson's scheme to test Robertson's methods on the West coast, the clergymen lobbied Arthur for support and, at Robinson's request, Bedford suggested that Robertson's Aborigines be transferred to Robinson.¹⁶⁵ McGeary, the convict bushman who accompanied Robinson on most of his journeys, recalled selecting the Aborigines for Robinson's first Mission:

...I understood that these natives, who had been taken by Mr. Gilbert Robertson, were to have gone out with him again, upon his plan to take the natives, but that Mr. G. A. Robinson got an order to take these men away from Mr. Gilbert Robertson, and to go out upon his plan...¹⁶⁶

The authorities appeared to have placed little importance on Robertson's sensitivities or rights in the matter when conducting this transaction.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ In September 1836, prior to his departure for England Arthur interrogated Robinson on who originated the plan. Arthur claimed to have heard of the plan in his office prior to its being put into operation Robinson denied it was from him. Arthur then said he must have heard of the idea either from Robertson or Bedford. Robinson thought the idea of suggesting that Robertson proposed the plan to be "...monstrous..." and quickly volunteered the information that he had conferences with Bedford on the subject well before the 1st Friendly Mission. see Plomley. N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.384

¹⁶⁵ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.37

¹⁶⁶ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. 21 April 1837. p.129 AOT SLTX/AO/NP/461

¹⁶⁷ Robertson's spirited defence of Eumarrah and confrontation with authorities over Aboriginal legal rights, probably eroded any official sympathy he was due, thus placing him in a position

From the time that Robinson first embarked on the Friendly Mission he had already secured the protection of powerful supporters, strategically placed within the Aborigines Committee, Bedford chief among them.¹⁶⁸ Well removed from Arthur's scrutiny while maintaining contact with the seat of power through regular correspondence with Bedford, it was not difficult for Robinson to develop and implement his own policies towards the Aborigines. In those early days of the Mission, Robinson probably thought that his best interests coincided with those of the Aborigines, and this was justification enough for his actions, he certainly had little respect for the opinions of the authorities. When it was decided to release three of the Aborigines he had captured at Circular Head, Robinson railed in his journal against "...those wiseacres at their parlour fireside at Hobart Town..." and wrote that he was "... the only person that can judge of what is best to be done..."¹⁶⁹ The only two European witnesses who could have provided a credible alternative account of Robinson's activities were the bushmen McGeary and McKay. However, they were both dismissed by Robinson, who, after making good use of their services, took great pains to publicly discredit their characters and downplay their value to the Mission.

Robinson next had reason to call on the services of Bedford in 1831 when John Batman emerged as a potential rival after being placed in charge of a group of Sydney

that Robinson was able to exploit.

¹⁶⁸ William Bedford was known for the colourful "last minute soul-saving exhortations" at public hangings that earned him the epithet "weeping willie". He had little time for Catholics or Wesleyans who often had to seek Arthur's intervention to restrain Bedford's aggressive behaviour. Bedford later was at odds with his fellow clergymen when Norman accused him of being a "liar and drunkard" as to the latter charge, at one stage Arthur had to issue a warning that "his drinking would lead to his dismissal". By 1835 the rift between Arthur and Bedford became very public after Bedford took exception to remarks Arthur made to him in a personal letter, comments that brought attention to "the derangement of Bedford's pecuniary affairs" and the fact that Bedford's "word was not to be relied upon".

see *Historical Records of Australia. Resumed Series III, Volume VII op.cit.*, p.720

Levy, M.C.I *op.cit.*, p.140, pp.180 - 182

¹⁶⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.209

Aborigines imported as trackers. Robinson appealed to Bedford to have his authority as head of the Aboriginal service recognised officially. Bedford interceded and was able to reassure Robinson that "...everything will be placed under your direction so that you will have the best evidence of implicit confidence being placed in your exertions..."¹⁷⁰ In 1832 Bedford again intervened on Robinson's behalf, this time to secure a very generous remuneration package for his final mission to the West coast; it also gave employment to Robinson's son George jun. by attaching him to the Mission on full adult wages.¹⁷¹ McGeary later revealed the extent and value to Robinson of Bedford's intercessions:

...Mr Bedford called a Committee, and stopped my pay, and paid it over to young Robinson, to amount of £35 13s 4d., a mere boy, that never was on the strength of the party...Then to suit his father's purposes he took him with him as a burthen to the party, one man to carry his blanket and clothes, and another to carry his pet opossums. One of these two useless boys gets *one thousand acres*, and the other *five hundred acres*, and the father *three thousand*..making in all seven thousand five hundred and sixty acres. He has received in money since 1829, two thousand one hundred pounds...¹⁷²

In the same statement McGeary described Robinson's use of him as a personal messenger in his dealings with Bedford:

...When we were at Cape Portland, I was sent to Hobart Town three times (two hundred and thirty miles) for Mr. Bedford to interfere in his [Robinson] behalf, to get him made a Magistrate. I was present when he spoke to the Governor, and the Governor would not approve of anything of the sort...¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.77

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp. 85 - 85

¹⁷² *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. 21 April 1837. p.129 AOT SLTX/AO/NP/461

¹⁷³ *ibid.*,p.129

McGeary also accused Robinson of exaggerating the perils to which the Mission was exposed, and recalled that even the Big River tribe was open to peaceful conciliation:

...There never was anything like danger but once, and that was in taking the Big River tribe, that Mr. Robinson made such a show of at Government House; and then there was little or no danger, for they found that we had with us their own sons and brothers and sisters travelling comfortably with us, and they talked to them and were glad to join us, and kissed and hugged one another - so that all we had to do was to bring them together...¹⁷⁴

It is a matter of record that Robinson brought in the remnants of the Big River and Oyster Bay tribes with the promise that the Government would "...redress all their grievances..."¹⁷⁵ and that the West coast tribes were taken by armed force. However, it is not so clear how Robinson induced the other tribes to leave their homelands for the Bass Strait islands. In 1835, Robinson wrote to Arthur seeking to postpone his taking up the command of Wybalenna on the basis that rumours were circulating among the Aborigines that they would be returned to their homelands upon his arrival.¹⁷⁶ It would appear from Robinson's eagerness to avoid facing the issue, a reasonable assumption that, at the very least, he had given some Aborigines, Wymeruck amongst them, the assurance that the move was of a temporary nature and eventually they would be allowed to return.

By the time Robinson embarked on the Friendly Mission, most of the Aboriginal tribes were already fragmented and demoralised in the aftermath of the invasion and war. The chieftains had every reason to be receptive to the overtures of a skillful negotiator

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.129

¹⁷⁵ Calder, J.E. *op.cit.*, p.23

¹⁷⁶ Reynolds, Henry. *Fate of a Free People. op.cit.*, p.154 see also Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.938. Note.12

offering a peace treaty that would allow them to remain unmolested in their homelands. This would be particularly true in the case of the remnants of the North West and West coast tribes, people who had gathered together for mutual support in the lands of the Manegin, Tarkiner and Peterndic, distant from European activity. However, Robinson made no attempt to offer Pedder's treaty terms to Wyne a chief of the region specifically nominated by the Aborigines Committee. Reluctant to surrender any vestige of power to potential rivals, Robinson was unlikely to promote a scheme that immediately transferred power and authority to Pedder's 'residential agents'. Also, the introduction of a number of other Europeans into the Aboriginal service with direct access to the tribes would have quickly revealed the true nature of the Mission's activities.

For the North West tribes, Robinson's failure to negotiate a safe haven for Wyne and his charges marked the final chapter of seven years of European invasion and occupation. A period characterised by a series of genocidal massacres perpetrated by the VDL Co., followed by armed expulsion of the few remaining survivors by the Colonial Administration.

Chapter Six

Resistance



Attack on a Settler's Hut. 186? water-colour possibly by Bonwick, James 1817-1906, (*National Library of Australia*).

On the 3 February 1835, Robinson, on claiming the balance of his bounty money, reported to the Colonial Secretary John Montague that: "...the entire aboriginal population are now removed...".¹ However, Robinson's confidence was misplaced, as persistent reports of an Aboriginal presence in the VDL Co lands necessitated the organisation of a further expedition. This new search party consisted of nine Aborigines led by Robinson's two sons George jun. and Charles. On the 20 November 1836, the expedition came across an Aboriginal family comprising an adult couple with four children near Cradle Mountain.² The family could not be persuaded to join the Mission and eventually escaped back into the bush. Apparently

¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*. *op.cit.*, p.926

² This family is commonly assumed to be that of William Lanney see *The Examiner* 21 July 1990, Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, pp. 197-198 and Murray, Tim (ed.) *op.cit.*, p.223

they were afraid of one of the Mission's Aborigines because of an involvement in the earlier spearing of his father.³

Following the expedition's return, further reports providing evidence of a persistent and hostile Aboriginal presence in the district continued to emerge. Curr complained that at the beginning of September 1839, three Aborigines had attempted to steal blankets from the Chiltern hut at the Surrey Hills.⁴ On the 5 October of the same year,⁵ Curr reported an attack at the Surrey Hills by two Aboriginal men, a woman and a youth that resulted in a VDL Co servant Neal McDonnell sustaining five spear wounds. A further attack took place in December 1840, again at the Surrey Hills, this time a servant, James Lucas, was speared and then pursued to his hut where an attempt was made to stone him to death. His life was spared only through the timely arrival of another VDL Co servant.⁶ The attacks on VDL Co huts continued in both intensity and daring, with huts adjacent the Circular Head establishment at West Bay being raided on the 6, 13, 14 and 19 July 1841.⁷ Receiving no satisfactory response from his numerous letters to the Colonial Secretary, Curr decided on a direct approach to John Lee Archer, the Police Magistrate. In his letter, Curr noted that the Magistrate's official instructions were "...to use every possible exertion to remove the Natives without violence..."⁸. Curr queried the practicality of that advice, drawing attention to the Magistrate's limited resources of only three constables. Convinced

³ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.679

⁴ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary. 3 October 1839. AOT VDL 23 p.483

⁵ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary. 5 October 1839. AOT VDL 23 p.494

⁶ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary. 23 January 1841. AOT VDL 23 pp. 185-186

⁷ Lennox, G. *The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Tasmanian Aborigines: A Reappraisal. op.cit.*, p.30

⁸ Letter from Curr to Lee Archer. 10 August 1841. AOT VDL 23/10 VDL Microfilm Reel 20/1 p. 296

that the authorities had no intention of implementing the measures he considered necessary to resolve the situation, Curr warned that: "...I now once more write to absolve myself from whatever bloodshed, whether of whites or blacks, may ensue..."⁹ adding that:

I will go as far as any individual whatever to prevent the wanton shedding of the blood of the unhappy remnant of these people, but I will not be guilty of the false humanity of sacrificing unoffending white men by exposing them without ample means of defense, to their murderous attacks.

Curr next wrote to the Colonial Secretary reporting a robbery on the 13 September 1841, this time at Woolnorth. No doubt mindful that the lessons of the Goldie incident were still fresh in the minds of his men, Curr wrote:

...There is an impression amongst the people of this district that to shed the blood of the natives even in self defence, would subject them to a trial at least on a capital charge the consequence is that the men feel that they are placed in greater danger by the Natives than they would be by bushrangers, firing on whom would be accounted a laudable action, and the Superintendent of the Woolnorth Establishment informs me that those who are at liberty to leave will do so, if another robbery is committed, and hence he reports to the Directors of the Van Diemen's Land Company that "unless assistance is obtained from the Government to capture these men the consequences will prove fatal to Company's flocks" which is also my opinion...¹⁰

Curr also reiterated his previous warning, or perhaps thinly veiled threat, that if not the VDL Co itself, then its servants were very close to taking unofficial direct action to remove the Aboriginal menace should the authorities fail to respond to his complaints:

⁹ *ibid.*,

¹⁰ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary. 21 September 1841. AOT VDL 23/9. pp. 323-324

...I refer His Excellency to my repeated reports during the last two years of the atrocities committed by these people & to my solemn warning that blood will be shed on one side or the other if means are not promptly taken to prevent it...¹¹

On the 2 November 1841, the press reported that a party of "...eight or nine native blacks had recently twice visited the farm of Mr. King at Rocky Cape..."¹² describing one of the party as "...very aged..."¹³ Three weeks later on the 23 November, the same band of Aborigines were reported as attacking Mr. King's farm¹⁴, driving away two men and robbing the hut of flour, blankets, sugar and two guns. After the raid, the Aborigines scattered and dispersed King's cattle and sheep. The paper reported that the group, estimated at eight in number, possessed "...no less than seven guns..." between them. A few days before this attack the same Aborigines had also stolen two guns and provisions from a nearby VDL Co hut at Table Bay.¹⁵ As it is commonly assumed that there were no other Aborigines at large in the Colony from November 1836 to December 1842, it is widely believed that the Lanney family was responsible for the robbing of huts belonging to the VDL Co.¹⁶ However, Aboriginal attacks during this period were much more serious than a few raids for provisions upon isolated huts. The spearing of stock, the attempts to kill VDL Co servants such as McDonnell and Lucas and the series of bold, wide ranging attacks from Woolnorth to Table Cape (see Table 1) are better described as acts of war than petty pilfering.

¹¹ *ibid.*,

¹² King's farm was actually at Table Cape

¹³ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*, 2 November 1841, Volume II. No. 1326

¹⁴ The farmhouse was located on the site of the present day Wynyard Golf Course.

¹⁵ Table Bay refers to the Freestone Cove area immediately to the east of Table Cape.

¹⁶ see Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.199. Robson, Lloyd. *op.cit.*, p.531 and Murray, Tim (ed.). *op.cit.*, p. 224

Table 1		
Year	Month	Incident
1839	September	Three Aborigines rob hut at Chiltern ¹⁷
	October 5	Four Aborigines attack Neil McDonnell spearing him five times at Surrey Hills. ¹⁸
1840	December	James Lucas speared and stoned at Surrey Hills ¹⁹
1841	July 6, 14, 23, 25.	VDL Co huts robbed of Blankets, Clothing and Ammunition at West Bay, Circular Head. ²⁰
	July 19	Miller's Hut robbed. ²¹
	August 23, 29	Two VDL Co huts at Woolnorth robbed of everything they contained. ²²
	September 13	Shepherd's hut robbed of everything at Woolnorth whilst three VDL Co men present who were unable to resist. ²³
	October	Robbery of James King - loss of sheep. ²⁴
		Attack on John King's farm at Table Cape by 8 or 9 Aborigines. Servants attacked, Stock dispersed and driven over a cliff and farm house robbed. ²⁵
1842	January 1	VDL Co servant attacked by Aborigines at Surrey Hills. ²⁶
	January	Repeated attempts to rob VDL Co hut at Studland Bay while Company sheep were destroyed and wounded by the Aborigine's dogs. ²⁷
	February 16	VDL Co hut robbed at Circular Head and several valuable horses speared. ²⁸
	February 27	Spear attack on 2 VDL Co servants at a place known as "The Patch" on Table Cape. ²⁹

¹⁷ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary 3 October 1839, AOT VDL 23 p.483

¹⁸ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary 5 October 1839, AOT VDL 23 p.494

¹⁹ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary 23 January 1841, AOT VDL 23 pp. 185 - 186

²⁰ Letter from Curr to Lee Archer 27 July 1841, AOT VDL 23/9 pp. 292-294

²¹ *ibid*

²² Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary. 14 September 1841. HRL. VDL 23 LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 20 Local Letters. p.323

²³ Letter from Curr to Colonial Secretary. 21 September 1841. AOT VDL 23/9 pp. 323-324

²⁴ Letter from Curr to John King. 30 October 1841. HRL. LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 20/1, p.346

²⁵ *The Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*. 29 November 1841. Volume V. No.263

²⁶ Inward Despatch No.1. Gibson to Court. 25 February 1842. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 35/1 p.5

²⁷ Monthly Returns at Woolnorth January 1842. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 39/2.

²⁸ Letter from Gibson to Colonial Secretary. 25 February 1842. HRL. VDL 23/11 LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 20/2. p.48

²⁹ Letter from Gibson to Colonial Secretary. 3 March 1842. HRL. VDL 23/11 LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 20/2. pp. 49 -50.

The absence of any listing of Aboriginal attacks from January to June 1841 in the above table may be explained by Curr's decision not to report them. In a letter to Lee Archer in August 1841, Curr stated:

... Finding that my representations to the Govt. produced no attempt whatever to give even a semblance of protection to this district, I have ceased entirely to trouble them on the subject though the Natives have seemed of late to lose no opportunities of plundering huts and spearing sheep and horses, both at Woolnorth and at the Surrey Hills and have made other attempts besides those I have represented to spear our men...³⁰

There is also some evidence that the Aborigines were not idle during this period. In April 1841, an attack was recorded on the property of Mr. Thomas Field who owned a stock run situated just outside the eastern border of the VDLC's grant at Middlesex Plains. The *Cornwall Chronicle* reported the incident in detail:

We learn that a tribe of nine people, one of whom was an old white-headed man, visited the stock station lately of Mr. Thomas Field, at Middlesex Plains, about 82 miles from Launceston. Only one man,³¹ who is in the service of the Circular Head Company [VDL Co], was in the hut when the blacks approached; he, having been speared by the same party about three months back, was frightened of them, and immediately barricaded the door and forbid their entrance. Failing in all attempts to force one, they proceeded to pull the house down, threatening during their work of destruction their bitter vengeance on the unlucky inmate, who fortunately was preserved from it by the approach of two men armed, coming up when the house was nearly razed to the ground.³²

Whilst some of the petty thefts may be attributed to the Lanneys, it is difficult to reconcile many of the attacks, that were clearly organised as resistance to European

³⁰ Letter from Curr to Lee Archer. 10 August 1841. HRL. LHC VDLC. Microfilm Reel 20/1. p.296

³¹ The man in the hut was most likely James Lucas who was speared in December 1840 at the Surrey Hills.

³² *Cornwall Chronicle*. 17 April 1841. Volume 7, No. 339

invasion, with contemporary accounts of the family's character. This family who chose to live in isolation for six years through fear of one Aborigine and who were incapable of making any resistance when their daughter Victoria was captured and abused by a single shepherd at Cape Grim was hardly likely to undertake attacks of this nature. Victoria's rescue was eventually organised by the VDL Co in February 1842.³³ The remainder of the family was eventually captured with ease and without violence by two sealers accompanied by two New Holland women keen to claim a reward posted by the VDL Co. Gibson reported the manner of their capture:

...It appears that these men first met the natives near the river Arthur about the 25th October since which period they have been in constant intercourse with them & by kindness & conciliation succeeded in allaying all their suspicions on the 4th inst. they induced them to come into their Boat on the pretext of conveying them to a more favourable place for hunting & the wind proving fair they landed them here in a few hours...³⁴

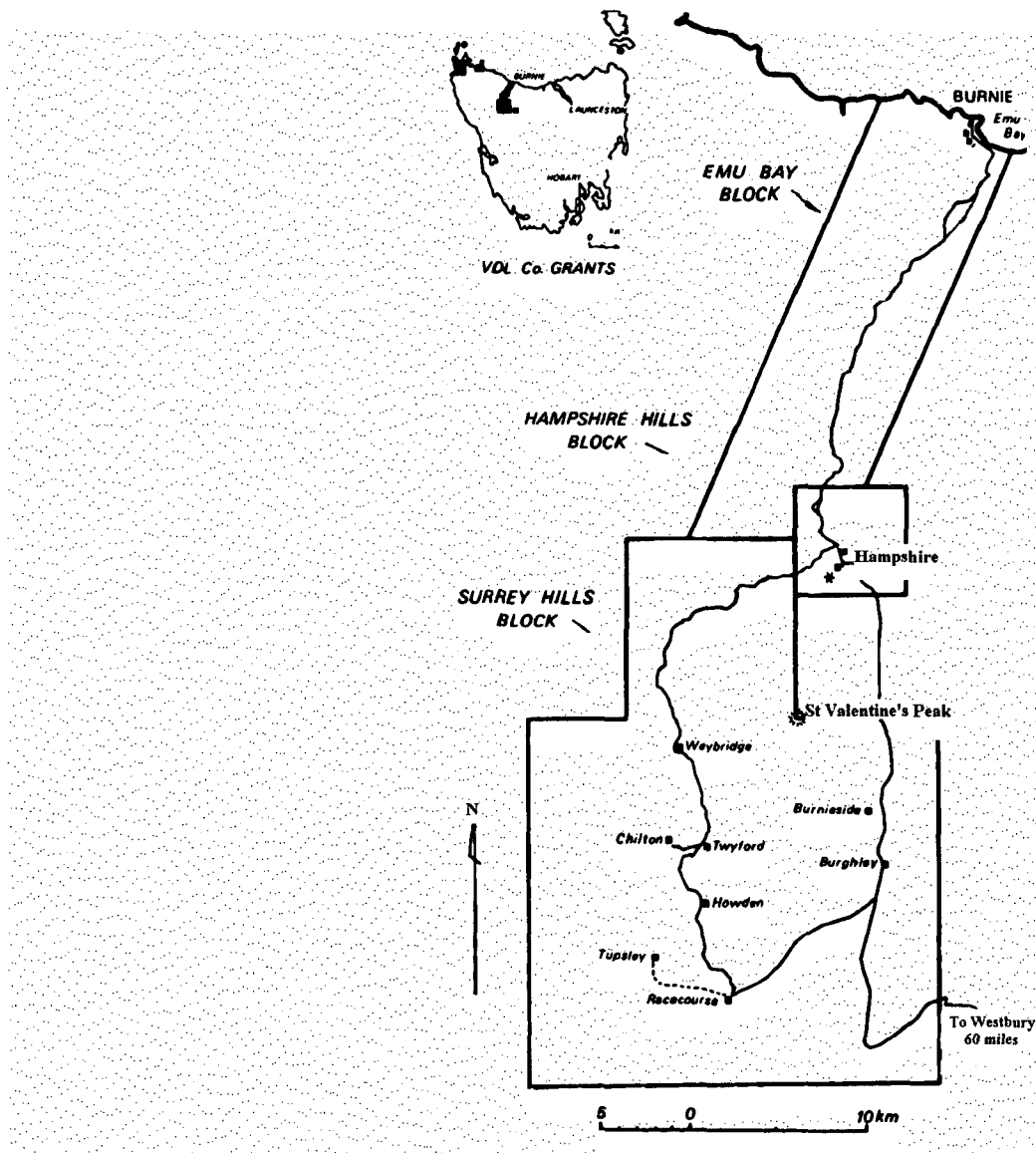
A family burdened with 3 young boys aged from 3 to 7 yrs old, and trusting enough to be tricked into captivity, hardly fits the profile of a band that was able to elude their pursuers for four years while terrorising the whole district. There are no records of the Lanneys ever displaying any aggression towards Europeans, travelling with or possessing dogs, or of carrying any weapons or guns. Following the family's arrival at Flinders Island, the then Superintendent of the establishment, Henry Jeanneret, made his own judgement of the Lanneys:

...The poor creatures from Circular head [= Arthur River] are very docile, cheerful and orderly, shewing no disposition to resort to the bush, always willing to make

³³ Inward Despatch No. 1. Gibson to Court. AOT VDL 5/7. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 35/1. p.5

³⁴ Letter from Gibson to Colonial Secretary. 8 December 1842. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 20 Local Letters.

themselves useful, and amusing themselves with killing small birds with their short sticks. They are intelligent and make progress in understanding our language...”³⁵



Van Diemen's Land Company Establishments in the Hills
derived from: Murray, Tim. (ed.) *Archaeology of Aboriginal Australia*. St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin. 1998. p.216

There is also little reason to suppose that the Lanneys belonged to any of the tribes from the North West region. The family was first detected by Robinson's sons, well out of the North West tribal areas, near Cradle Mountain late in 1836, presumably on

³⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence*. op.cit., p.140

the VDL Co stock route that linked Burleigh Hut to Launceston via Westbury.³⁶ Less than two months before this contact the Assistant Police Magistrate at Westbury reported two sightings of two male Aborigines passing through his district.³⁷ The Lanney family³⁸ are also identified as the Aborigines that occupied the Burleigh hut (see Chart below) for a period of time after the area was abandoned by the VDL Co in 1839.³⁹

The most likely sequence of events is that the Lanneys entered the North West region via the VDL Co stock route, occupied the Burleigh Hut from 1839 to 1841 and then travelled along the old Aboriginal track (see Appendix 8) to the West Coast where they fell in with the sealers who effected their capture.⁴⁰ Robinson's journal entries covering his expeditions through the North West and West coast tribal lands make no reference to the existence of the Lanney family. If the family were a remnant of one of the North West tribes, one would have expected them to have joined up earlier with the chieftain Wyne along with other refugees for mutual support and protection. Even during the period following the removal of the Tarkiners, the family would most likely have chosen to remain on the West coast in familiar territory, rich in traditional sea food and well away from Europeans. A site as well known and exposed as the

³⁶ The distance from Burleigh Hut to Westbury was 60 miles (97 kilometers).

³⁷ Letter from W. Moriarty to Captain Matthew Forster Chief Police Magistrate. 6 April 1837. AOT CSO 5/247

³⁸ John Lanney and Nabrunge with their daughter Victoria, and sons Albert (Charley), William, Pleti (Peter), Francis (Frank) and Banna (Barnaby Rudge).

³⁹ Murray, Tim (ed.). *op.cit.*, pp. 224-225 Tim Murray is probably correct, although he based his assumption on the belief that there were no other Aborigines abroad, Murray also attributes the attacks on the VDL Co to the Lanney family.

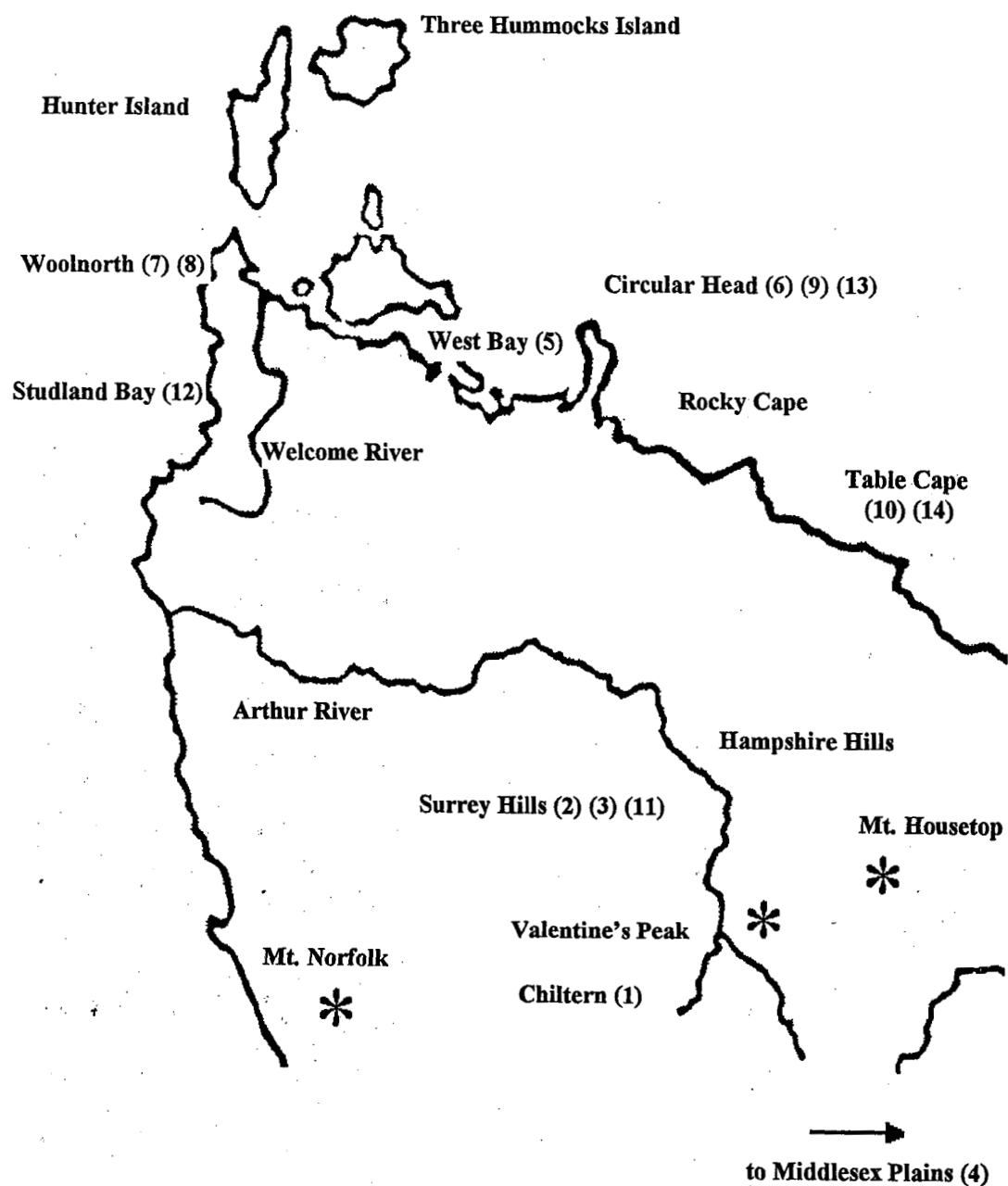
⁴⁰ The newly appointed Agent of the VDL Co James Alexander Gibson rewarded the sealers with £50 for their capture. see Inward Despatch No. 23. Gibson to Court. 10 December 1842. AOT VDL 5/7:111. Gibson replaced Curr who was dismissed from the VDL Co with two years notice on 11 February 1840 to take effect on 12 February 1842. see The VDL Co Memorandum Book 1829 - 1842. HRL LHC VDL 46/2 p.228

Burleigh hut would have been a poor choice for Aborigines with local knowledge seeking to avoid capture.

Many of the raids could only have been conducted by Aborigines familiar with the local terrain, the location of the VDL Co establishments and who were obviously at war with white intruders. The map and table on the following page depicts the sequence and targets of the Aboriginal raids revealing a discernible clockwise pattern of movement that embraced all of the areas of the North West region occupied by European settlers. The timing of the raids also indicates that this was a highly mobile group capable of great rapidity of movement. The nature of the attacks, such as the spearing of McDonnell five times, the attempt to stone Lucas to death after spearing him, the willful destruction of European horses and stock and the accumulation of firearms is clearly not the work of fringe dwellers foraging for supplies. During the attack on King's farm, the Port Phillip press reported that an attempt was made to spear King's men, who only escaped with difficulty. Two bullocks were driven over a high cliff and the natives destroyed any flour that they could not carry away.⁴¹ The Launceston press also noted that Mr. King, who was well acquainted with these Aborigines referred to them, not as a family, but as a tribe that lived to the westward.⁴²

⁴¹ *The Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*. 29 November 1841. Volume V. No.263

⁴² *Cornwall Chronicle*. 20 November 1841



Sequence of Tommeginer Raids 1839 - 1842

1	Chiltern	September	1839	8	Woolnorth	September 13	1841
2	Surrey Hills	October 5	1839	9	Circular Head	October	1841
3	Surrey Hills	December	1840	10	Table Cape	October	1841
4	Middlesex Plains	April	1841	11	Surrey Hills	January 1	1842
5	West Bay	July 6, 14, 23, 25	1841	12	Studland Bay	January	1842
6	Circular Head	July 19	1841	13	Circular Head	February 16	1842
7	Woolnorth	August 23, 29	1841	14	Table Cape	February 27	1842

Tim Murray claims that Robinson's evidence "...indicates that only a small family group was free in northwest Tasmania..."⁴³ after 1834. This is not strictly accurate; on the 7 April 1834 the Friendly Mission reported following the path of a band of Aborigines⁴⁴ near Sandy Cape, until they discovered sharpened stakes driven into the native pathways for the purpose of wounding pursuers.⁴⁵ The strategy proved to be successful as the chase was promptly called off, leaving the band, a group of Tommeginers at large. Further evidence for the presence of other Aboriginal groups at that time, may be found in Alexander McGeary's claim in 1837 that he had personal knowledge of a number of Aborigines in the North West region who were still at large.⁴⁶

Given the frequency of Aboriginal attacks on the VDL Co and the real threat posed to property and servants, Curr was in no doubt as to the seriousness of the situation he faced. In a stream of letters directed to the Colonial Secretary and Lee Archer, Curr warned that unless the authorities took decisive action to remove the Aborigines, the settlers would be compelled to use force to defend themselves. This was a position Curr was quite prepared to provide some leadership in promoting. Following the raid on King's farm, the *Cornwall Chronicle* advised John King that rather than appeal to the Governor, Sir John Franklin for protection, he would be better served by taking the law into his own hands and "...repelling force by force..."⁴⁷ Curr supported

⁴³ Murray, Tim (ed.). *op.cit.*, p.224

⁴⁴ This was most likely the band of 'Tommyginny' referred to by Robinson the previous day when noting that 'his natives' were so frightened to venture inland because of their presence. Robinson was also warned that those natives had "...declared their intention never to be subdued..." and if he did succeed in finding this band he and his Mission natives would most assuredly be killed.

⁴⁵ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.875

⁴⁶ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. 21 April 1837 p.129. AOT SLTX/AO/NP/461

⁴⁷ *Cornwall Chronicle*. 20 November 1841

those sentiments by providing James King with a pistol for the same purpose, even though Lee Archer had just refused to issue King with a firearm, with the warning that the shooting of Natives would not be tolerated. Curr sympathised with King's position by recalling how Lee Archer had earlier advised him of the Government's stance that "...any person shooting the Natives, notwithstanding their committing attacks on our huts, would be severely dealt with..."⁴⁸ Lee Archer had also thought it necessary to inform Curr that "...if any Native was killed it would be his duty to hold a Coroner's inquest..."⁴⁹ The latter threat placed Curr under considerable pressure as he was well aware of the likelihood that some of his employees, many with extensive experience in hunting Aborigines on behalf of the VDL Co in the past, would take the law into their own hands. Curr warned the authorities of this possibility whilst pleading that he would not be personally accountable for the resulting bloodshed, rather that the responsibility would lie with the authorities through their lack of action. As the frequency and daring of the Aboriginal attacks began to take its toll, the Superintendent at Woolnorth issued a warning that any further raids would lead to any servants free to do so abandoning their positions.⁵⁰ Frustrated by the authorities' lack of action, Curr prepared his directors for the eventuality of a confrontation by warning "...It is my aim and object that the Govt. should be roused from their supineness that I shall cast but a very hollow protection around the Natives as the most likely means of inducing them to bestir themselves..."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Letter from Curr to John King. 30 October 1841. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 20/1. p.346

⁴⁹ Inward Despatch No. 236. Curr to Court. 14 September 1841. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 34.

⁵⁰ Letter from Curr to Franklin. 21 September 1841. AOT VDL 23/9 pp. 323 - 324

⁵¹ Inward Despatch No. 234. Curr to Court. 12 August 1841. HRL LHC VDLC Microfilm Reel 34.

The Aboriginal attacks suddenly ceased after the attempted spearing at Table Cape on 27 February 1842, just two weeks after Curr's replacement and a few days before his departure for Port Phillip. There are no more reports of any Aboriginal presence, not even the occasional pilfering of stores, until the capture of the Lanney family some nine months later on 4 December 1842.⁵² This abrupt end to hostilities raises a number of questions. If the Lanney family were the source of this campaign of resistance, why did they suddenly stop? If the attackers were a party of Tommeginers, what happened to them after the 27 February? If Curr's predictions had been realised and there was another atrocity, then the deed was kept well hidden from the authorities. This latter option appears the most likely answer, that is, the last band of Aborigines in the north west met their end at the hands of the VDLC's men. For if the Tommeginers had for some reason decided to cease hostilities one would have expected further reports of their presence. Sightings of their hunting parties, smoke from campfires or even evidence of abandoned campfires would have been noted. There is also little likelihood that the perpetrators of any massacre would openly boast of their actions following the experience of the Goldie incident and subsequent warnings from Lee Archer. What is clear, is that the newly appointed manager, Gibson, felt that he had grounds to be absolutely confident that at the time of the Lanney's capture there were no other Aborigines left in the VDL Co lands. He was able to report to his directors in no uncertain terms that: "...These were the only Natives at large in this Colony...".⁵³ Shortly after this pronouncement Gibson, in an attempt to reverse the VDLC's waning fortunes began leasing blocks of land to tenant

⁵² Letter from Gibson to Colonial Secretary. 8 December 1842. HRL LHC VDLC Local Letters Microfilm Reel 20.

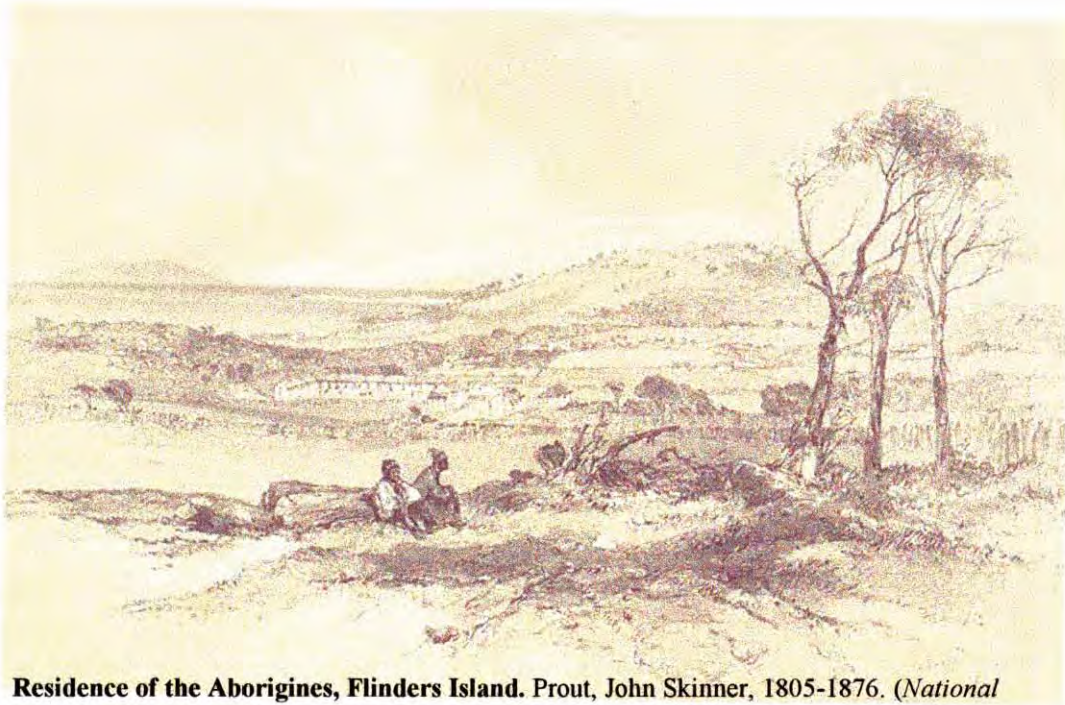
⁵³ Inward Despatch No. 23. Gibson to Court. 10 December 1842. AOT VDL 5/7:111

farmers. A policy that resulted in a small rush of settlers into the district in 1843.⁵⁴ With the region now fully opened up to outside scrutiny, any Aborigines who may have retreated into the hinterland would certainly have been discovered as the new wave of prospectors and settlers criss-crossed the former VDL Co's property. Gibson's final reassurance to his company proved to be well founded as there were no further sightings or contact with Aborigines in the north west region.

⁵⁴ Mercer, Peter. *Gateway To Progress. op.cit.*, p.9

Chapter Seven

Exile



Residence of the Aborigines, Flinders Island. Prout, John Skinner, 1805-1876. (*National Library of Australia*).

While the Black War continued in the North West, Pevay, along with the rest of the Mission Aborigines were sequestered in Hobart, accommodated in a building adjoining Robinson's house. There is little information about their activities or the interest they were bound to attract while in Hobart, although Robinson did note that their conduct was "...beyond all praise and exceed any eulogy that I can bestow on them...".¹ Robinson, heavily engaged in personal business activities, had little time to spend with the Mission Aborigines during this sojourn, he was also seriously considering writing a book detailing the operations of the Friendly Mission. The colonial artist Benjamin Duterreau (1767-1851), took this rare opportunity of a

¹ Letter from Robinson to Colonial Secretary. 25 February 1835. AOT. CO/280/60

prolonged Aboriginal presence to prepare his set of sketches for his final work *The Conciliation* depicting Robinson and the Friendly Mission meeting up with the Big River tribe.² While the painting incorporated prominent members of the Mission - Truganini, Woorradly and Tim.me, Pevay was not included. Duterreau may have also had illustrations for Robinson's book³ in mind when making his drawings.⁴ Having duly reminded Arthur and the public of his earnest desire for a future position at Port Phillip, Robinson reluctantly prepared to leave Hobart to take up his official post as Superintendent of the Flinders Island establishment. Prior to leaving, Robinson requested and took charge of the Aboriginal children⁵ currently at the Orphan School to accompany him to Flinders Island.

The *Tamar* set sail for Flinders Island on the 1 October 1835. For Pevay and most of the Friendly Mission Aborigines on board, this was the last time they would set foot on their homeland. Pevay's brother Penderoin died while they were in Hobart leaving eight adult Aborigines to make the journey.⁶ Mannalargenna seemed acutely aware of the significance of this voyage, no doubt realising that Robinson's earlier assurances that he would be allowed to remain in his traditional lands were now worthless. On the 8 October as the vessel passed Swan Island, Robinson's journal described Mannalargenna's grief and pain as he bade farewell to his country:

² Ryan, Lyndall. *The Struggle for Trukanini 1830 - 1997*. Sandy Bay, Tasmania Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings. Vol.44. No.3. September 1997. p.168

³ There is no evidence of Robinson finding the time to attempt a book during this period.

⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission*. *op.cit.*, p. 927

⁵ The eight children were seven boys: Peter and David Bruney, Friday (Walter George Arthur), Tommy (Pyboke - Care.reen's son a Petermidic), Manune, Ben and one female child Pegernuneburic.

⁶ Jenny, Mannalargenna, Jemmy, Richard, Sall, Timmy, Truganini and Woorradly.

...When we were off Swan Island Mannalargenner the chief gave evident signs of strong emotion. Here opposite to this island was his country; Swan Island was the place I brought him to when I removed him from his country. He paced the deck, looked on all the surrounding objects, fresh recollections came to his mind. He paced to and fro like a man of consequence, like an emperor. Round his head he had tied a slip of kangaroo skin, which added greatly to his imperial dignity. At one time he took the map in his hand and looked on it intently, took the spyglass and looked through it. It was amusing enough to see him. He allowed that I was equally great with himself, that I had travelled in all directions.⁷

On the 17 October the party arrived at the Aboriginal establishment Wybalenna on Flinders Island. Lieutenant William James Darling, having recently resigned his post to join his regiment in India, had been replaced for a short period by Henry Nickolls. The settlement had grown to resemble a village, and under Darling's administration had functioned reasonably well. The Quaker, James Walker, who visited Flinders Island commented favourably on Darling's treatment of the Aborigines. Making particular note of Darling's respect for Aboriginal culture, his encouragement of corroborees and hunting parties and acknowledgement of Aboriginal social structure by exerting:

...a very beneficial influence over them also through the medium of their chiefs, of whom there are three, with their wives, very properly considering that authority exercised under cover of their influence, and as their act, would be better received than from a European...⁸

Walker also approved of Darling's egalitarianism and custom of seldom sitting down to eat without some Aborigines in his hut as guests.⁹ However, the Aborigines from the North West and West were less at ease in Darling's company. Exile for these

⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, pp. 297 - 298

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 281

⁹ Walker, James Backhouse. *Early Tasmania*. (Fifth Impression) Hobart. M.C.Reed, Government Printer. 1989. p.241

remnants of the western tribes had been particularly stressful, a situation compounded by being taken against their will, transported to an alien world and then settled in the midst of their traditional enemies. With virtually no history of personal contact with Europeans, they were unfamiliar with European ways and customs and the consequent lack of English made communication difficult. Darling, aware of their unhappiness and estrangement from the general activities of the establishment, opposed Arthur's proposal concerning the feasibility of giving the Aborigines some tract of land in Tasmania to settle, partly on the basis that:

There are many natives on the settlement whom I would not think of trusting on the main for some time to come; I allude here particularly to the western tribes who are now mustering strong, and who have almost all joined the settlement at different times since I assumed the charge. I have very little doubt but they would take the first opportunity of making off to their own country...¹⁰

There were about 120 Aborigines at the settlement on the Mission's arrival,¹¹ sadly for Pevay; his brother Wymeruck who had been sent there from Hunter Island, had died some time earlier. In order to celebrate his assumption of command of the settlement, Robinson quickly organised a feast of mutton and plum pudding for the Aborigines followed by a display of fireworks.¹² Unfortunately, the festivities were followed by a period of stagnation as Robinson did little to improve material conditions for his charges during the next few months. When Robinson left to visit Hobart after only five months on the Island, the Wybalenna surgeon James Allen wrote to Robinson pleading for his early return to arrange repairs to the Aborigines,

¹⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 1001

¹¹ Ryan, Linda.. *op.cit.*, p.237

¹² Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 306

'deplorable huts' before winter set in.¹³ Robinson however, preferred to remain in Hobart, devoting his time and energies to gaining Arthur's agreement to lobby the British Government on his behalf, for the position of Protector for the Aborigines in New Holland.¹⁴

Conditions actually deteriorated at Wybalenna during this first period of Robinson's administration. The availability of clean water was an ongoing problem, as was the food supply, with game on the Island being rapidly depleted. Robinson, more concerned for his charges' spiritual rather than material well being, acknowledged the severity of the situation when he wrote of the need to speed up Christian instruction as "...death was making very rapid inroads among the people and no time should be lost".¹⁵ Mannalargenna's death on the 4 December,¹⁶ less than six weeks after his arrival, showed that even the Friendly Mission Aborigines were not immune from the stresses and privations of this Island prison.

On the completion of his business in Hobart, Robinson returned to Flinders Island on the 20 June 1836, bringing his wife and children to await his expected appointment as Chief Protector for the Aborigines and relocation to Port Phillip. Robinson devoted his energies during this time towards the goal of 'civilising' those Aborigines under his jurisdiction, a process that by the standards of the time involved the undermining of tribal identity and culture. With the aid of newly appointed Aboriginal constables, the

¹³ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.113

¹⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 355

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.314

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.312

use of grease and ochre was banned in the establishment, corroborees abolished¹⁷ and tribal songs were gradually replaced by Christian hymns. Tribal names, a fundamental element of Aboriginal identity, were replaced by English caricatures,¹⁸ Pevay earned the title Napoleon, Truganini became Lalla Rookh, Woorady - Count Alpha, Ty.me.nid.ic - Adolphus and others were given similar appellations such as Nimrod, Achilles, Hannibal, Cleopatra and Barnaby Rudge. This was a common strategy adopted by slave plantation owners in the Americas, also keen to breakdown tribal identity and pride.¹⁹ In the latter case, names normally reserved for animal pets were often used while most would be known by a diminutive lacking any family name,²⁰ the latter practice was retained by Robinson. However, it is fair to say that Robinson had additional motives for renaming some of the Aborigines, in particular those women who had been given demeaning and often male names²¹ by their sealer captors. Robinson described this practice as "...most barbarous and uncouth..."²² he also reported that the "...natives were highly pleased with the change: it was what they desired..."²³

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.436 and p.468 although officially banned, illicit gatherings and corroborees continued to be held in the bush.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 336

¹⁹ Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery*. London. Verso. 1999. p.325

²⁰ Ira Berlin makes the additional point that the withholding of a surname also served the function of denying the slave his or her adulthood. This observation seems apt in the case of Flinders Island, where the worth of traditional Aboriginal skills, knowledge and culture was set at naught. Anything of value or meaning such as sewing, farming, English language or Christianity had to be taught, thus the everyday activities organised for the Aborigines at Wybalenna consigned their charges to a state of permanent childhood. see Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1998. p.96

²¹ Examples being: Boatswain (Loo.er.ry.min.er), Duncan (Rar.nap.per.lit.ten.ner), Jock (Plore.ner.noop.per.ner), Isaac (Wore.ter.cow.wid.yer).

²² Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 337

²³ *ibid.*, p.337 this is not to say that the Aborigines abandoned the use of their tribal names.

Nonetheless, tribal differences remained a persistent feature of life on Flinders Island.²⁴ Hostilities frequently flared up between the three major grouping at the settlement, the Big River, Ben Lomond and Western tribes.²⁵ During Henry Nickolls period as superintendent²⁶ he had cause to complain that the later arrivals, the Western tribes, were less civilised than the Ben Lomond or Big River tribes.²⁷ However, Nickolls' notes reveal that the new arrivals had quickly developed a sophisticated political strategy for survival in their dealings with the more numerous Eastern tribes:

...The greatest drawback to a perfect civilisation of the natives is the determined hostilities of the Ben Lomond and Big River tribes to each other. The Western natives have attached themselves either to one or other of the two tribes as their inclination led them thus virtually making the whole body for the purpose of war to consist of only two tribes...²⁸

Robinson's initial response to these tribal divisions was to organise separate housing for the western tribes²⁹ as well as adopting a policy of sending the different tribal

²⁴ Bonwick, James. *op.cit.*, p.164 made note of the conditions existing during the very first period of life on Flinders Island while under Sergeant White's control:

"...Difficulties beset him at the outset in the hostility of the various tribes. Certain coalitions existed; but bitter quarrels, proceeding to blows, were of daily occurrence. The Ben Lomond and Big River tribes were at an open issue. The Western would side with either, according to caprice. The Cape Grim Mob, the most remote and barbarous of all, kept completely aloof from the rest. All was in chaos. The Native women went about wholly naked. Indeed, the greatest disorder prevailed. To add to their trouble, fresh people kept landing, supplies were not flourishing, and the climate put all in bad temper..."

²⁵ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.185

²⁶ Henry Nickolls was Superintendent at Flinders Island from September 1834 to October 1835.

²⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 84

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.88

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.467 Major Ryan reported that the Western natives scarcely ever entered their huts see p.635

groupings off hunting by themselves for extended periods in order to ease growing tensions in the settlement.³⁰

A market was established in order to teach the rudiments of commerce, however the concepts of money and unequal distribution of wealth proved difficult notions to impart. Some Aborigines spent time polishing their coins and were surprised to find they were of no more value than dirty coins, whilst one widow who only had a halfpenny could not understand that in parting with all she possessed she should receive a lesser exchange than others who also parted with all their coins.³¹ However, none of these activities could mask the perpetual sense of gloom that pervaded the settlement. Robinson recorded visiting the remnants of the Western Tribes during this period:

It was a pitiable sight. They were western natives and all old people and in the last stage of affliction. The first that emerged from the tent was PETUCK...The poor creature was reported yesterday to be dying. She was now led by her husband and so feeble as scarcely to be able to stand. TIDDERAP succeeded her. She was alone, her head tied up, and presented a melancholy aspect. TINNENOOP and PONEDIMINEEP followed in succession. They were in a similar condition.³²

As early as 1833, Darling had noted that the death rate was particularly high among the late arrivals, those Aborigines from the North West and Western regions.³³ Darling informed the Colonial Secretary of some the problems the Western people presented :

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 334 - 336

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 378

³² *ibid.*, p. 484

³³ Plomley argues that this was because the Western tribes had less contact with Europeans, thus less opportunity to develop some immunity to introduced diseases, particularly pulmonary complaints.

...they will not come into hospital, and lay upon a sick bed till they are cured; they require to be coaxed and persuaded to submit to a proper mode of treatment, and narrowly watched, or by their careless exposure of themselves, they place themselves beyond the power of medicine; I allude more particularly to those who have come from the westward, and who have not yet dispensed with the idea that when sickness comes upon them, and evil spirit had got possession of them; the others are beginning to understand that their disorders arise from physical causes...³⁴

Four years later in 1837 the attitudes of the North West and Western tribes remained unchanged, with Robinson reporting on the death of Ponedimerneep, that she like many others of the "... western aborigines refused all sustenance and therefore fell a victim of her own obstinacy..."³⁵ In the following year Tiderap, a Peteridic woman from the Pieman River, died of tuberculosis also steadfastly refusing all attempts at medical interference.³⁶ Backhouse and Walker noted in their report of 1834 that thirty one Aborigines, chiefly among the Western tribes who had been the shortest time on the island, had died at the settlement in 1833.³⁷ Of the thirty one listed, twenty five were from the North West and Western regions. Eventually, sickness and death spread unchecked throughout the whole Aboriginal population. Of the two hundred and one Aborigines sent to the Island from 1831, seventy three had died by 1835, thirty one died in 1837, fourteen in 1838 and ten in 1839.³⁸ On one occasion Truganini admonished Robinson with the observation that soon "there would be no blackfellows to live in the new houses".³⁹ With a 63.7% death rate over eight

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.75

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.496

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.565 The Medical Officer James Allen, reported in 1837 that the bulk of Aboriginal fatalities at the settlement were due to pneumonia. However, autopsies from 1837 - 1838 show an increase in cases of tuberculosis until 1839 when Influenza became the major cause of death. See section on Medical Histories in Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, pp. 937 - 942

³⁷ Walker, James Backhouse. *op.cit.*, p.247

³⁸ West, John, *op.cit.*, p.314

³⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 485

years, it was becoming obvious to all, that to remain on Flinders Island was to die, as Chief Justice Pedder amongst others had foreseen. As early as 1835, the surgeon Dr. Allen had reported that there was a shortage of fresh meat and flour and that virtually all of the game on the island had been '...annihilated...'.⁴⁰ Dr. Allen also complained that the sealers had made matters worse by destroying the native populations of Cape Barren geese, an important source of food on the islands, by taking most of their eggs. Richard Henry Davies the former master of the *Shamrock* and *Eliza*, visited Wybalenna on many occasions and who took a keen interest in the well being of the Aborigines, was of the opinion that the death rate:

...may have been in great measure owing to their change of living and food, but much more to their banishment from the mainland of Van Diemen's Land, which is visible from Flinders Island; and the natives have often pointed it out to me with an expression of the deepest sorrow depicted on their countenances..." In fact, the unhappy captives pined and died from "...homesickness..."⁴¹

The Aborigines Committee would have been better served to have heeded Pedder's warnings in 1831, as well as the common sense and practical advice offered by Captain Jackson, Master of the vessel that transferred the first Aborigines to Flinders Island who had felt it his duty to voice his concerns:

I have the honour to state that as the Cutter Charlotte is now ready to proceed to Gun Carriage Island for the purpose of removing the Establishment from there to Great Island. I would strongly recommend to the Aboriginal Committee to take into consideration the nature of that Island, the difficulty of access, and as well as the constant danger that a vessel is exposed to, and from what little knowledge I have of

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 299

⁴¹ Walker, James Backhouse. *op.cit.*, p.242

that and other Islands in the Straits - I certainly am of opinion that there's none of them in any one way adapted for an Establishment.⁴²

The death rate did not escape the notice of the popular press in both Hobart⁴³ and Launceston, the Launceston based *Cornwall Chronicle* sounded a warning in April 1838:

The aborigines imprisoned on Flinder's Island continue to die at the rate of 20 percent without any births to supply their loss. Ninety are now the sum total that remain of all the various and large aboriginal tribes of Van Diemen's land; so that the utter extinction of the race is hastily approaching...⁴⁴

In June of the same year the paper in an lengthy editorial headed "THE ABORIGINAL PRISON" described the status of the Aborigines on Flinders Island as that of being kidnapped. The paper also argued that if Government propaganda of three years ago was true and that the Aborigines on Flinders Island were;

...so well instructed in the rules of civilised life, and so perfectly correct in the observance of them, that they might, as a body, be submitted to the white population, as an example worthy of imitation...⁴⁵

then there should be no good reason, particularly after a further three years of instruction and the expenditure of £15,000, to prevent the Government from abandoning the establishment at Flinders Island. The article also called for the "...illegally transported natives..." to be restored to their own lands and the liberty that was theirs by right, having been deprived of that liberty by unlawful invaders and by unlawful means.

⁴² Submission from Captain Jackson, Master of the Cutter *Charlotte* to the Aborigines Committee. 18th June 1831. AOT. CSO 1/323/7578. Vol.8 pp. 14 -15

⁴³ see *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review* quoted on page 180

⁴⁴ *The Cornwall Chronicle*. 7 April 1838. Volume 4. No. 165

⁴⁵ *The Cornwall Chronicle*. 9 June 1838. Volume 4. No. 174

There were also some expressions of disquiet from the public during the same period. The *Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review* published an extensive letter expressing concern over the Aborigines current plight, arguing that it had never been necessary to banish them to Flinders Island in the first place, or:

...that it is now necessary to keep them away. It appears to me ridiculous, when the Colonies on the Main Land of Australia must have Natives about them, and must, therefore, find a way of treating, other than exterminating or deporting them, - (for these, they may rely on it, the British Public will never again tolerate)- that it should be considered *impossible* for the colony of Van Diemen's Land to be subject to the same necessity...⁴⁶

Robinson, now surrounded by a human catastrophe of his own making and design could only echo Arthur's earlier letter to Sir George Murray, commenting "...The sad mortality which has happened among them...is a cause for regret but after all it is the will of providence and better they died here where they are kindly treated than shot at and inhumanly destroyed..."⁴⁷ However, within a year the Commandant was under considerable personal pressure from Aborigines at the settlement to take some decisive action to remedy their situation, he noted in his journal 21 March 1837:

King William [Tongerlongerter] and King George [Druleerpar] both have importuned me to leave this place of sickness, and saying "what do you mean to stay till all the black men are dead?"⁴⁸

Three months later, with genuine sadness, Robinson recorded the death of King William.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. 20 April 1838

⁴⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, pp. 314 - 315

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 432

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 452 - 453

James Allen, the Wybalenna surgeon during this period, attributed his own failure to contain the Aboriginal death rate, on language difficulties, the exposed nature of their Flinders Island shelters, difficulties in adapting to the custom of wearing European clothes and the introduction of salt meat as a major element in their diet.⁵⁰ Amidst these pressures, and mounting attention and criticism in the press, Robinson redoubled his efforts to have the whole project abandoned by transferring the Flinders Island Aborigines to the mainland, where, no doubt the mingling of the Aboriginal groups would obscure the enormity of the disaster. Robinson also made an attempt to shift some of the blame for what had transpired on to the colonial authorities. In July 1838, Robinson claimed the Flinders Island climate to be the major contributor to the Aboriginal death toll, drawing attention to the widespread rate of pulmonary disease and arguing that "... nothing less than a change of climate will afford relief...".⁵¹ Robinson intimated in his journal that he had anticipated this eventuality prior to the establishment of the settlement, and had arranged with the authorities to have the Aborigines periodically returned to their tribal lands during the summer months.

...in the stipulations made to the aborigines it was guaranteed by me on behalf of the government that they should be protected and cared for generally, and that as far as practicable they were in the summer months *under proper protection* to occasionally visit their native districts and further that myself and family should reside with them until those stipulations were completed...⁵²

Robinson went on to lay the blame for the breach of this agreement at the feet of the colonial administration:

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 920 - 922

⁵¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 747 this was also the opinion and recommendation of the surgeon at the time Dr. Mathew Walsh

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 747

...I confess I have frequently deplored the non-fulfillment of this part of the conditions, the more so as in all my dealings with the natives I have been scrupulously exact in keeping faith ... the sickness and dire mortality that has happened to the natives since their residence on those islands is much to be deplored and locality has also created discontent and occasionally given rise to fits of despondency...⁵³

The passage concluded with the curious remark that he had originally thought "...12 - 18 months would suffice to carry the intentions of the government into effect at the settlement, but the period had extended much longer...". This is the first mention of the existence of any such official plan or agreement, and the proposal deserves to be treated with a great deal of skepticism.⁵⁴ In the days of sail, the sheer logistics of the undertaking to regularly transport individual tribes back to their respective home lands throughout Van Diemen's Land for what amounts to a summer holiday, makes such a notion a nonsense. It is also abundantly clear that once having released Aborigines into their tribal lands there would be little prospect of rounding them up for the return journey to the much loathed Flinders Island. This would be particularly so for those tribes from the West and North West regions who were removed from their lands by armed force. In the latter case, armed hostilities were still taking place between the Aborigines and the VDL Co at the time of Robinson's journal entry and would continue to do so for a further four years. Even more unlikely is Robinson's suggestion that he was under the impression that the transportation of Aborigines to Flinders Island was to be of a temporary nature only. These are surprising comments from a man who only seven years earlier was trying to convince the Aborigines Committee that once on Flinders Island, the Aborigines would find the lifestyle so

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 748

⁵⁴ There are good reasons to believe that Robinson unofficially made such promises to individuals such as Wymeruck as a ruse to gain their cooperation. see Chapter 5. p.201

ideal they would have no wish to return to the mainland.⁵⁵ Robinson was also well aware, having supervised the operations, that the colonial authorities were unlikely to have gone to the considerable expense of extending the establishment with substantial brick works if short term occupancy was the goal. As far as the suggestion that his promises were part of some sort of officially formulated agreement, it must be remembered that it was Robinson who had argued against forming any kind of treaty with the Aborigines. The members of the Aborigines Committee were presented with the view that one couldn't enter into any agreements with the Chiefs as little "...dependence could be placed in their observance..." of such.⁵⁶ At the time the Flinders Island option was being debated, neither Arthur, Pedder nor the Colonial press gave any impression that the exile was only for a short duration, in fact, Pedder went so far as to characterise the Aborigines' situation as one of "...hopeless imprisonment..."⁵⁷

By 1839, the situation on Flinders Island had deteriorated to the point where the population of European guards, staff and administrators with their families was nearly equal to that of the Aborigines 47% vs. 53%.

⁵⁵ Shaw, A.G.L. *op.cit.*, p. 76

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.81

⁵⁷ Turnbull, Clive., *op.cit.*, p.131

Table 2.	
Population of Flinders Island 31 December 1839 ⁵⁸	
Free Adults	9
Children	15
Military	7
Wives	7
Children	6
Convicts	8
Aborigines - Men	24
Women	25
Children	9
Total	110

The North West tribal survivors had by now been reduced to little more than a dozen members and with the deaths of the recognised Aboriginal chieftains, Pevay - now 25 years of age was increasingly obliged to shoulder the responsibilities of leadership. Pevay had his wife Fanny to care for, and the Friendly Mission Aborigines were taking on the role of his new family. On one occasion, Robinson took Pevay and the Mission Aborigines on an exploration of the Island along with another five Aboriginal men. Robinson soon felt their displeasure. On making camp that night they refused to share their food with him, as Pevay's brother Penderoin had done on the last expedition. While the Aborigines feasted on duck, swan and kangaroo, Robinson was forced to eat dry bread and tea, as they also refused to make him damper or help erect his shelter at night.⁵⁹ This was as far as Pevay and his friends could take their protest without jeopardising any future opportunities to leave the Island. Prior to leaving Hobart in 1835, Robinson had let it be known that he wished to take Aborigines from Flinders Island to Port Phillip in the hope that they would assist him "...open a friendly communication with the natives there..."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Report to Franklin CSO 5/237. p.34

⁵⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 511

⁶⁰ Roberts, Jan. *op.cit.*, p.11

As the "sad mortality" continued to take its toll on the Aboriginal population the surgeon assisted by Robinson, conducted post mortems in the garden shed prior to burial. Many of the corpses were decapitated, and after the skulls were processed they were either added to Robinson's private collection or presented to selected authorities such as Captain Maconochie and the Franklins, as prized specimens.⁶¹

Pevay had to endure many indignities in silence over the next few months. Robinson desecrated the body of his brother Pendowtewer by removing his skull as a souvenir for his collection immediately upon his death on the 4 August 1838. When Lamoderick, Pendowtewer's wife, died a few months earlier, Robinson had made a present of her skull to Lady Franklin. Then on 17 January 1839, their orphaned nephew, and Pevay's only living relative, Tymenidic, was also given to Lady Franklin as an interesting diversion and object of interest at Government House.⁶² Tymenidic or Adolphus had been a constant source of annoyance for the Wybalenna authorities and Robinson, in all likelihood, was pleased to see the back of him. Given that Tymenidic was only 9 years of age at the time of capture and that he lost his father and many other close relatives soon after, it is little wonder that he had difficulty in adapting to, and embracing the Flinders Island regime.⁶³ On the 7 April 1837, Tymenidic was sentenced to be locked up for two nights and withdrawal of indulgences for two weeks for breaking the leg of Robinson's turkey hen.⁶⁴ In May of the same year he was sentenced to be whipped on the breech by the catechist for

⁶¹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, pp. 530 - 537

⁶² This was in response to Lady Franklin's specific request to Robinson that he provide her with a "black boy along with snakes of different species". see Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.605 and p.779.

⁶³ Robinson reported that Adolphus was carrying the scars of an encounter with Europeans in the form of a musket ball lodged in his body when taken to Flinders Island, however his general description of surrounding events makes it likely that Robinson made a mistake in identification. see Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.464

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.437

stealing a knife, the property of the government.⁶⁵ Robert Clark the catechist and storekeeper, reported Tymenidic to be "...talented but idle, not vicious, very destructive of his clothes..."⁶⁶ The character reference that Robinson provided for Lady Franklin, described him as "...somewhat volatile in disposition...", Robinson also advised "...and I would recommend persuasion before coercion at the same time he should be kept under command..."⁶⁷

In 1839, news was finally received of Robinson's appointment as Chief Protector for Aborigines at Port Phillip. He was to receive a salary of £500 per year and four Assistant Protectors, Charles Sievwright, James Dredge, William Thomas and Edward Parker were employed to provide support.⁶⁸ The policy of guarded resistance pursued by the Friendly Mission Aborigines paid off when Robinson elected to take them with him, even though Franklin had allowed him only one Aboriginal family.⁶⁹ When they arrived at Port Phillip on the 1 March 1839, Tim.me, Pevay's companion from the North East coast, had lost his wife Numbloote - a victim of a major flu epidemic just prior to departure.⁷⁰ Pevay too, had little reason for regret in leaving Flinders Island, his whole family, with the exception of his nephew Tymenidic, were now all dead. There is no further record of Tymenedic until he was reported as being sent to sea as an apprentice on the government vessel *Vansittart*, he then joined an overseas vessel bound for England sometime in the late 1840s certainly after

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.440

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.744

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.779

⁶⁸ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p. 151

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 161

⁷⁰ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p. 860

1842.⁷¹ Of the sixty two Aborigines transferred to Flinders Island from the North West tribes, only nine still remained alive.

⁷¹ see Appendix Ten

Chapter Eight

Aftermath



Pevay, watercolour on paper 1832. Thomas Bock 1793-1855, from Fenton, J. *History of Tasmania*, Walsh, Hobart, 1884

The centre of Aboriginal activity in Port Phillip was located on about 2,000 hectares of land on the site of the present Melbourne Botanical Gardens.¹ Robinson and his family moved into a small cottage on the site, thus giving Pevay and the Van Diemen's Land Aborigines access to the local Aborigines camped in the area. The numbers of Aborigines on the site were growing rapidly, as the loss of traditional hunting grounds

¹ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p. 177

to graziers drove them to Melbourne in search of food and blankets. Four Assistant Protectors had been appointed to aid Robinson in his work, and Robinson, in turn allocated them responsibility for their own districts. Charles Sievwright was allocated the Western District, Edward Parker the North-west or Lodden, James Dredge the North-east or Goulburn and William Thomas Melbourne and Western Port areas. Pevay accompanied Robinson on a tour of Western Victoria from March to August 1841 and was impressed with the vastness of this new land. Tim.me was allocated to work for Mr. Alfred Langhorne and assisted him in droving cattle to Adelaide and to Sydney.² Woorady was ageing and often in poor health, allowing Truganini to travel widely, often in company with the Port Phillip Aborigines. This was a constant source of annoyance for Robinson, as parties were continually being despatched to bring her back, on one occasion from as far as Point Nepean.³ This individual resistance presaged the group resistance that may have come from an awareness that the relationship with Robinson was coming to an end. Robinson, unable to obtain funding for the VDL Aborigines' expenses decided that they were a liability and had duly notified La Trobe that he "...wished to get rid of them..."⁴

Not long after Pevay⁵ returned from his journey with Robinson, he gathered together his wife Fanny, Tim.me, Truganini and another woman May.te.pue.min.er (Matilda). Matilda, originally from the Leeter.maire.mener Tribe of the Oyster Bay tribe had endured the life of a sealer's woman after being kidnapped by John Starker.⁶ There

² *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 25th June, 1842

³ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume One*. Melbourne. Heritage Matters. 1998. p.351

⁴ *ibid.*, p.105

⁵ Some of the material surrounding this period in Pevay's life is derived from McFarlane, Ian. *Pevay: A Casualty of War*. Monash University. Honours Thesis. 1999.

⁶ Plomley, Brian and Henley, Kristen Anne. *op.cit.*, p. 115

was little reason to stay in Melbourne, the plight of the local Aborigines gathered there was all too familiar for the VDL Aborigines. William Thomas described their condition:

A scene truly appalling presented itself; five were in the last stage of dysentery, [it was] a piercing cold night and ...not a blanket to cover them. [Next day a doctor visited and said that] In his whole experience of eighteen months...he never visited them in such a diseased and wretched state of want and disease, that five or six have already died and that five or six more are at the verge of death, and that unless something is done to relieve their wants, speedy extinction must soon take place.⁷

Rather than remain and risk a similar fate, Pevay led his little band into the bush to commence a series of raids and attacks that emulated those of Eumarrah at the height of the Black War in Van Diemen's Land. William, the eldest son of the Assistant Protector Thomas, wrote of the circumstances of Pevay's departure:

At length they tired of the monotony not being allowed to go about at their will. There was a man among them, a man superior in every respect to the others. He had been a leading man a chief in his own country, and he was the leader of the malcontents here - his name was Napoleon [Pevay]. He talked about what they had suffered at the hands of the white man, how many of their tribe had been slain, how they had been hunted down in Tasmania - now was the time for revenge, they were not cooped up in an Island, they had unlimited bush to roam over at their will - a woman Lalla Rooke [Truganini] aided him and abetted him.⁸

Pevay was echoing the very threats of revenge that his wife Fanny had often made to the sealers in Bass Strait.⁹ By October, all the settlers in the Mornington and

⁷ Roberts, Jan. *op.cit.*, p.43

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 59 - 60

⁹ Fanny's real name was Wore.ter.pye.er.ter.nan.ne, she had been kidnapped by the sealer McKenzie who had drowned near Flinders Island. After his death another sealer James Thompson seized McKenzie's women and held them until Parish took them away in 1830, this was when Pevay first met her. Fanny was the sister of Eumarrah and shared his spirit of

Westernport districts were either arming themselves for defence or escaping to the safety of town. Initial newspaper reports claimed that Pevay's band were fighting together with local Aborigines.¹⁰ To Robinson's embarrassment, an October edition of the *Port Phillip Herald* announced that:

...numerous depredations have been committed in the Westernport direction by a party of the Aborigines accompanied by and associated with two Van Diemen's Land blacks and three women who are as well skilled in the use of the firearms they possess as the males. These people had been imported by Mr Robinson for the purpose of aiding in the civilization of the Aborigines of Australia Felix...¹¹

By November the paper was able to catalogue the "The Black Murderer's Career"¹² by describing in great detail the following raids. Pevay had initially led his party to Dandenong where they armed themselves by stealing a gun from a Mr. Horsefal. They then attacked the home of Mr. Ordon, firing several shots through the roof in an attempt to burn the house. After noticing one of the two men inside observing their actions through a keyhole they fired shots through the door, upon which the occupants fled by making a small hole in a rear wall of the dwelling. Pevay's band then climbed down through the chimney and obtained some provisions in the form of a bag of sugar and 130 lbs of flour. A raid on Mr. Munday's station provided additional firearms. They then proceeded to Mr. Allen's station stealing more firearms and

resistance. Turnbull, a man who had been living with the sealers informed Robinson that Fanny had "...so mastered the sealers that she would do very little for them...[and that] ...the sealers said that they would sooner put the woman on the main... [so that] ...the government should have her". (see Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, pp.304 - 305) Robinson would have done well to listen to the rest of Turnbull's advice when he warned that Fanny "...was a woman that would do a deal of mischief if put on the main, and that she has frequently said that if she was on the main she would teach the black fellows to kill plenty of white men..."

¹⁰ Roberts, Jan. *op.cit.*, pp. 59 - 60

¹¹ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 29th October, 1841

¹² *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 26th November, 1841

three kangaroo dogs. Mr. Armstrong's station was next where they shot and seriously wounded Mr. Westway and his companion before taking their firearms and £22 in notes. Following the raid Pevay burned the money in the campfire, a gesture that symbolised the severing of any links with European culture.

After a number of other attacks and robberies the *Port Phillip Herald* reported a raid on Mr. Anderson's station:

The fellows (blacks) arrived at Anderson's station about 3 p.m. and having watched the men leave the house after their dinner, they entered and found inside only Mrs. Healey, the superintendent's wife another woman and child. They first turned the two women out of the house, and "Jack" [Pevay] ... then robbed the premises of three fowling pieces, three bags of shot, and a quantity of flour and sugar. One of the women began to cry for the child which was left inside, and begged that it might be given to her "Jack" said he would not hurt the child but obliged her to be off.¹³

On the 14 October, Robinson recorded in his journal the news that two white men had been murdered by two VDL natives.¹⁴ Robinson, well aware of who was involved and wishing to distance himself from his former charges, took no action to assist in the search for Pevay's band until ordered to do so by La Trobe on the 31 October.¹⁵ Robinson then embarked on a leisurely tour of Victorian Aboriginal stations knowing full well these were the last places that could expect a visit from Pevay's band.¹⁶ The main expedition to end the depredations of Pevay and his band was led by F.A. Powlett, the Commissioner for Crown Lands who along with William Thomas,

¹³ *ibid.*, 26th November, 1841

¹⁴ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 3*. Melbourne. Heritage Matters. 1998. p.13

¹⁵ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*. *op.cit.*, p.102

¹⁶ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson*. *op.cit.*, p. 214

commanded a large force that included armed police, black police and soldiers. They had great difficulty picking up the tracks of Pevay's band, who exhibited great skill in removing traces of their progress through the bush. Despite this skill, there were some tense moments. On one occasion Pevay, noticing that they were being pursued, promptly split his band up and had them scatter into a swamp. With the aid of black police, Powlett's force continued to press on until as the *Port Phillip Herald* put it "...the fugitives seized a whaleboat and put to sea..."¹⁷ Two weeks later Powlett and Thomas accompanied by mounted police, border police and a file of soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Ralston succeeded, with the assistance of seven Port Phillip Aboriginal trackers, in surrounding and capturing Pevay and his group near Cape Paterson.¹⁸ Several shots were fired at Pevay in order to induce his surrender.¹⁹ Lieutenant Rawson described the mêlée in his journal:

... We advanced down the hill, and were closing in upon them, I was about six feet from the fire, and could see them laying down, when a policeman who was on my left, catching a glimpse of a man's head, without orders, fired and missed him...Immediately out rushed dogs and men, the first at us, the latter to the scrub, everybody fired at them as they got a sight of them. I fired both barrels, right and left, and I saw one drop. I had five pistol balls in each barrel.²⁰ I immediately ordered the men to surround the scrub to prevent their escape...In about a minute out came a woman covered in blood [probably Matilda] from a wound in the head, a ball had struck the back of the head and cut the scalp open...Just now a man was taken escaping from the other side of the scrub, and directly after, we saw the other haring across the country near half a mile off - we told the women to call him back - and on our promising not to shoot him, he came back and was secured.

We thus had the whole party and to our astonishment only one wounded, which

¹⁷ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 9th November, 1841

¹⁸ *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, Melbourne. Volume.V. No.263. Monday 29th November, 1841

¹⁹ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 9th November, 1841

²⁰ Note the common practice of using shot or multiple balls in the barrel of smooth bore weapons against Aborigines as was also the case in the Cape Grim massacre.

was owing to the thickness of the underwood, tho' it must have been sharp work, as about thirty balls were sent at their heads.²¹

Securing their captives the authorities found them to be in possession of five single barrelled and three double barrelled guns, four pistols, one with a spring loaded bayonet - all of the firearms were loaded. In addition to the guns the band had also acquired three bags of shot, seven canisters of powder and a copper bullet mould capable of making 50 balls at any one time.²² Pevay was obviously collecting an arsenal clearly intended for a force larger than the one he presently commanded.

Powlett later testified that they appeared "perfectly cool" with Pevay calmly smoking his pipe and the rest of his band asking their captors for breakfast.²³ It was also reported that the prisoners seemed "...to treat the whole affair with great levity, and answer freely and openly every question put to them in relation to their brutal and murderous career..."²⁴ Powlett and William Johnston, a Border Police Constable, reported the band confessing to nine robberies and the shooting of four men, including the killing of two whalers on the 6 October, only three miles from the arrest site.²⁵ Pevay informed Powlett that they had killed the whalers believing that they were the miners, Watson and his Son-in-law who had shot at them after they were detected robbing his home a few hours previously.²⁶ Truganini then led Powlett to the place

²¹ Roberts, Jan. *op.cit.*, pp.. 76-77

²² *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, Melbourne. Volume.V. No.263. Monday 29th November, 1841

²³ *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, Melbourne. Volume.V. No.271. Monday 20th December, 1841

²⁴ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 26th November, 1841

²⁵ Willis, Judge. *Judge Willis's Notebooks. Book No. 12, Criminal Sessions 1841. Box 4, M.S.000195. Royal Historical Society of Victoria Library.* p.115

²⁶ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?. op.cit.*, p.105

where the whalers had been buried, and the bodies were subsequently exhumed. It appeared that Pevay had shot one of the whalers known as Yankee, killing him instantly. Timme had then fired upon and wounded the other whaler, a man called William Cook. Cook was subsequently despatched by being clubbed to death by Pevay and Truganini.²⁷ However, Truganini informed Powlett that she along with the rest of the women, were on a high bank quite apart from the scene of the attack.²⁸ It was this statement, together with Pevay's confession that was to play a major part in saving Truganini, Matilda and Pevay's wife Fanny from the gallows.

On the 30 November 1841, the whole party was committed for murder, the women before and after the fact.²⁹ The trial began on 20 December, and the case received extensive press coverage as it had excited a great deal of public interest. The prisoners were tried before Judge John Walpole Willis with Mr. Croke as Crown Prosecutor. The young Irish barrister, Redmond Barry, who had been recently appointed as standing counsel for Aborigines, took up the defence. Barry commenced the proceedings by entering a plea of not guilty on behalf of the prisoners. While Aborigines were able to make statements that could be presented in Court, they were not permitted at that time to give evidence from the witness box.³⁰ In 1838, the Attorney-General Campbell and Solicitor-General Wilde had advised that: "...to admit in a criminal case the evidence of a witness acknowledging to be ignorant of God or a future state, would be contrary to the principles of British Jurisprudence".³¹

²⁷ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 26th November, 1841

²⁸ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 24th December, 1841

²⁹ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 3. op.cit.*, p.24

³⁰ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Truganini: Queen or Traitor?*. *op.cit.*, p.109

³¹ Roberts, Jan. *op.cit.*, p.83

A position supported by Charles Wentworth using more colourful language: "It would be quite as defensible to receive as evidence in a Court of Justice the chatterings of the orang-outang as of this savage race."³² Witnesses for the prosecution were then called to give evidence on the circumstances surrounding the killing of the two whalers, some recalled the admissions of guilt by Pevay and Tim.me at the time of capture. Redmond Barry then called on Robinson as the chief defence witness.³³

Three months prior to this trial, on the 16 - 17 September, Robinson was in the same Court Room before the same Judge witnessing the trial of a Port Phillip Aborigine Bon Jon, also on a charge of murder.³⁴ Bon Jon was accused of the murder of another Aborigine, purportedly 'to get his wife'. Judge Willis went to great lengths to establish if Bon Jon understood the significance of his actions in the light of European law and custom. After deciding that Bon Jon did not, Judge Willis found him not guilty and he was discharged.³⁵ Judge Willis was following a precedent set in similar trial in 1835 when a New South Wales jury acquitted a Aboriginal man called Jack Congo Murrell on a charge of murdering another Aboriginal man. The *Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review* commented on the outcome:

We have already drawn the attention of the people to the injustice of subjecting the Aborigines of these Colonies to laws, of the very nature of which they are not only in the most perfect ignorance - but the subjecting them to be tried by Juries not their 'Peers,' is of itself a flagrant violation of those very laws themselves, under which every foreigner is entitled by express statute to be tried by a jury, one

³² *ibid.*, p.83

³³ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?* *op.cit.*, p.215

³⁴ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 3.* *op.cit.*, p.6

³⁵ Clark, Manning. *A History of Australia. Volume 3*, Melbourne. Melbourne University Press. 1992. pp. 128 - 130

half of which are to be foreigners. Thus therefore, monstrously absurd as it is to subject the Aborigine to laws utterly incomprehensible to him, to try him legally under those laws he is entitled to a Jury of one half of his own countrymen. The Jury very sensibly got rid of the difficulty by acquitting the prisoner.³⁶

With the example of Bon Jon's trial still fresh in his mind Robinson opened his short address to the Court with the words "...they have a knowledge of the principles of religion and the existence of a supreme Being, and know right from wrong..."³⁷ Any possibility that Judge Willis may have utilised the precedent he had set with the Bon Jon hearing for the benefit of the VDL Aborigines was now beyond consideration. Having sealed Pevay's fate with those words, Robinson made an attempt to save Truganini by relating the tale of how she had saved his life at the Arthur River and how "The women are not allowed by the men to act according to their own will - they are in entire subjection to the Men, in absolute thralldom".³⁸

Robinson had obviously not forgotten his brush with death at the hands of the Tarkiners. It was perhaps his earlier suspicions regarding Pevay's role in the incident and a desire for revenge that prompted this attack in Court. The target was clearly Pevay as Robinson provided a glowing character reference for Tim.me:

I know of Bob (Tim.me) having undertaken a journey, with my concurrence, in the service of Messrs. Langhorne and Bacchus, to Adelaide; the character given of him to me was extremely good Mr. Langhorne owed his life and those of his party to him; from the Murray blacks when they attacked his party... Bob has been in my service thirteen years; he was a lad when I got him, and he accompanied me in my first journey to Port Davy; I afterwards sent him back on account of his youth; on my subsequent journeys, he was with me, and conducted himself

³⁶ *The Tasmanian and Austral-Asiatic Review*. Hobart. 3rd June, 1836. p.182

³⁷ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 24th December, 1841

³⁸ Willis, Judge. *Judge Willis's Notebooks*. Book No. 12, *op.cit.*, p.119

satisfactorily; he was respectful; I never knew him dishonest, and he was always industrious; he was a native of the north-east quarter of Van Diemen's Land.³⁹

Robinson, mindful of having to justify his decision to bring Pevay to Port Phillip in the first place, reluctantly provided him with just a few token words "...he was with me in my last journey, and his conduct has been exemplary." Redmond Barry's final address to the Jury focused on the injustices inflicted on the Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land as providing an explanation and perhaps justification for the prisoner's conduct:

...it must be remembered that these men and their fellow countrymen once roamed over the green hills and wide plains of their native soil, the lands of all around, subject to no will but their own, no master but their own passions; what, he would ask have they come to? He did not wish to look back to and depict the purpose of their destruction first insidious and private, then open and declared, which eventually swept a numerous nation off the face of their native country, and transported the remnant to a foreign and to them, distant shore. Before the termination of the war, the Governor stated in a Dispatch that the first aggression, which led to so much blood-shed and destruction, had been committed by the whites and that their conduct had roused to a fierce determined and blood-thirsty course, those tribes whose friendship otherwise might easily have been conciliated.

Could it be thought that, in, consequence of a short abode with Mr. Robinson, the savage had forgot his wrongs, buried in oblivion the injuries he had suffered, and ceased to think of what to all minds is dear - revenge, no, impossible, the green hills of his country were too beautiful to be so easily forgotten, the limpid streams that fertilised his native plains could not thus be buried in oblivion, no, the whole feelings of the wild and untutored savage must predominate, and only slumber to burst forth with redoubled fury on the first opportunity; revenge in minds like theirs was not easily forgotten, and particularly for wrongs like theirs.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 24th December, 1841

⁴⁰ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 24th December, 1841

In making reference to the Black War, Barry clearly understood the connection between the resistance campaign waged by Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land and that undertaken by Pevay in Port Phillip. Barry, convinced that Pevay was the leader and instigator of the attacks closed his argument with the comment "...even if there was anything to criminate one man, there was not against the other, for he was clearly coerced by his companion; as for the women, there was nothing whatsoever to criminate them".⁴¹

The jury then retired, and after a short consultation pronounced a verdict of guilty against the male prisoners, and a verdict of not guilty against the females. The jury also recommended the prisoners to mercy on account of their previous good character, and under the peculiar circumstances under which they were placed. Judge Willis said the recommendation would be forwarded to the proper quarters, and directed the prisoners be brought up for judgment on the following morning.⁴² When the Court resumed the next day it was evident that Robinson's words had found their mark when Judge Willis donned his black cap and addressed Pevay and Tim me:

... You have been long enough with Mr. Robinson to have become acquainted with the scriptures, and that holy volume enjoins life for life, and that when this world closed on you, your souls live in another world. The sentence which the law awards, and justice now compels me to pronounce, that you be taken hence to the place from whence you came, and that on such day as his Excellency may appoint, you conveyed to a place of execution - of public execution - and there you be severally hanged by the neck till you be dead, and may God in his infinite goodness have mercy on your souls and pardon your sins.⁴³

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 24th December, 1841

⁴² *Port Phillip Patriot and Melbourne Advertiser*, Melbourne. Volume.V. No.271. Monday 20th December, 1841

⁴³ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 24th December, 1841

After due deliberation, the Executive Council of New South Wales refused to grant a pardon and the execution date was set for 20 January 1842.⁴⁴ Robinson noted in his Journal that on the eve of the execution, Pevay's wife Fanny "wept exceedingly, first said she would go, at last her feelings overcame, said 'no my like to see his face' ".⁴⁵ Faced with certain death, Tim.me, who had been removed from his tribe when captured as a young boy, and whose pride and confidence in his cultural heritage had been methodically undermined by European and Christian indoctrination, fared the worst. Demoralised and frightened, he lost his appetite, was unable to sleep and was given to constant weeping.⁴⁶ Pevay on the other hand, exasperated those hoping for signs of remorse, including the Press, by maintaining a brave unapologetic demeanour and "a state of perfect of unconcern".⁴⁷ On the morning of the execution, Tim.me was besieged by numerous Wesleyan and Anglican Clergyman. The Reverends Orton, Wilkinson, Thomson and Wilson finally achieved their ends when Tim.me acknowledged that "...he was a sinner, that God made him, was in heaven, everywhere...".⁴⁸ Pevay, who had slept soundly, ate a hearty breakfast of three pounds of bread, drank two panikins of tea, lit his pipe then laughed, snapped his fingers and shouted that he "...did not care a fig for anything...".⁴⁹ The Port Phillip Herald also reported that Pevay:

⁴⁴ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*. *op.cit.*, p.110

⁴⁵ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 3. op.cit.*, p.32

⁴⁶ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 18th January, 1842

⁴⁷ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 21st January, 1842

⁴⁸ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 3. op.cit.*, p.32

⁴⁹ Turnbull, Clive. *op.cit.*, p.216

...seemed perfectly unconcerned and even gay; he laughed heartily when his attendant was assisting him to put on the stockings, and expressed his unconcern at his approaching fate, saying, that after his death he would join his father in Van Diemen's Land and hunt kangaroo; he also said that he had three heads, one for the scaffold, one for the grave, and one for V.D. Land; his companion remained totally silent during these arrangements.⁵⁰

At 7.50 a.m. the Cart arrived to take them to the place of execution. Although it was Thursday morning and therefore a working day, a large crowd was gathering in the early hours of the morning just North of Lonsdale Street. The warmth from the newly risen sun was promising another fine day. There was a carnival atmosphere, as the crowd made up of a large number of women and children, many carrying picnic baskets, laughed and chattered as it made its way up the Eastern Hill. By 7.30 a.m. the throng had reached the rear section of the partly completed bluestone walls of the new Melbourne Gaol. The crowd, swelled by residents who poured into town from several miles around was estimated at five thousand.⁵¹

The excitement mounted when Captain Beers and a detachment of smartly turned out soldiers with bayonets fixed came marching in to join the gathering. Acting under orders the soldiers filed off and began to clear a path through the crowd to the base of the Gaol wall. As the crowd reluctantly parted the object of their attention was revealed, a rudely constructed wooden Gallows prepared in haste for the occasion, Melbourne's first execution.⁵² The entire Colonial Press was present for this historic

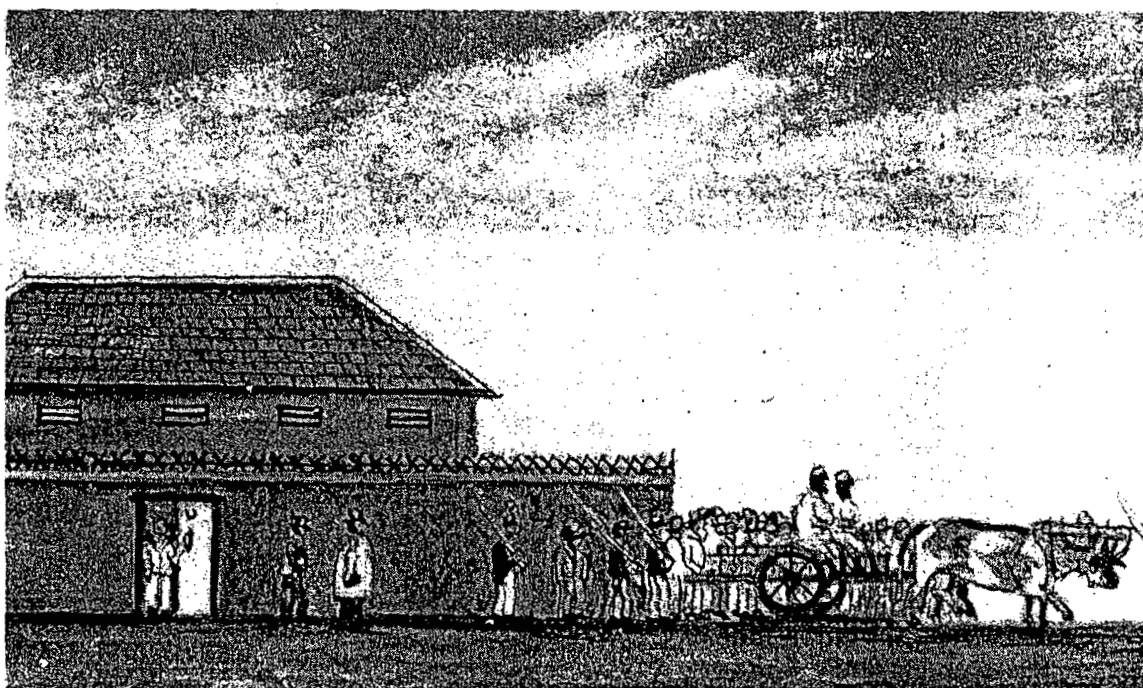
⁵⁰ *Port Phillip Herald*. Melbourne. 21st January, 1842

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 21st January 1842

⁵² *ibid.*, 21st January 1842

event, and a reporter from the *Port Phillip Patriot* took a keen interest in the gallows construction describing it as being "formed of two upright posts about twenty feet in height with a cross beam at the top to which the ropes were attached; the scaffold was formed of a plank two feet wide fastened to the gallows at the one end by a hinge, and supported at the other by a prop which being pulled away let fall the drop".⁵³

Eventually a clatter of hooves marked the arrival of a small procession of dignitaries headed by the Sheriff, Chaplain and Gaoler. As they made their way solemnly between the files of soldiers they were followed by a small covered cart drawn by two grey horses with an escort of two constables together with units of mounted and border police. The canvas covering of the cart concealed the condemned men, two Aborigines from Van Diemen's Land dubbed by the popular press as Bob and Jack.⁵⁴



The first execution (1875), Liardet, W.F.E. 1799 - 1878. *La Trobe Picture Collection*, State Library of Victoria.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Port Phillip Patriot*, Melbourne. 24th January 1842

⁵⁴ *Port Phillip Herald*, Melbourne. 26th November 1841

⁵⁵ Note that Liardet who obviously didn't witness the execution portrays the cart open instead of covered and has it drawn by bullocks instead of horses.

At the foot of the gallows the cavalcade came to a halt and the audience was finally rewarded with a view of the offenders as they were removed from the cart and ordered to kneel for the obligatory prayers. Both men were young, alert and in the sort of condition that only years of active life in the bush can produce. They would have appeared quite handsome had their dignity not been compromised by the ludicrous costume they were compelled to wear. The Gaoler had insisted on dressing them up for the occasion with white trousers, white stockings, white shirts and white caps.⁵⁶ One reporter described the effect, "...The convicts were dressed entirely in white, the contrast of which with their nearly jet black hands and faces gave the criminals an appearance particularly revolting...".⁵⁷ As the Colonial Chaplain Rev. Thomson slowly delivered the last service many in the crowd became impatient with the proceedings, some interjecting with "...cut it short...".⁵⁸ The Chaplain unperturbed, continued on for some twenty minutes with Bob listening intently and starting to sob audibly whilst Jack remained aloof from the proceedings and said nothing.⁵⁹

Finally the executioner stepped forward. Melbourne, not having a professional hangman, had decided on a convict named John Davies, who had volunteered for the task in return for £20 and a Ticket of Leave. After pinioning Bob and Jack's arms, Davies mounted one of the ladders to the narrow drop and awaited his charges. Jack followed first with some difficulty owing to the restriction on his arms. He nevertheless showed great composure and dignity, he ignored the crowd and calmly

⁵⁶ Clark, Ian (ed.) *The Journals of George Arthur Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, Volume 3. op.cit., p.32*

⁵⁷ *Port Phillip Patriot., op.cit., 24th January 1842*

⁵⁸ Turnbull, Clive. *Black War*. Melbourne, Lansdowne Press Pty Ltd. 1965. p.216

⁵⁹ *Port Phillip Patriot, op.cit., 24th January 1842*

placed himself over the drop next to the noose. As the executioner placed the noose round his neck, Jack maintained his courageous demeanour and requested that the hood not be drawn round his eyes as he wished to look at his friend.⁶⁰

By this time Bob was greatly distressed. He groaned bitterly as two men assisted by the executioner practically dragged him up the ladder. At one stage he nearly fell as he lost his balance. With Bob and Jack duly positioned the executioner descended and awaited the prearranged signal, then as Rev. Thomson uttered the words "in the midst of life we are in death..."⁶¹ he released the drop. The hinged plank fell some two feet then stuck fast leaving the two men choking and slowly strangling until someone had the presence of mind to knock away the obstruction. Jack died instantly as his noose was well adjusted. Bob was less fortunate, his death came slowly whilst he struggled in agony, his chest heaving violently. The crowd grew angry at this spectacle and loudly abused the hangman who "...only grinned horribly a ghastly smile in reply..."⁶² James Dredge⁶³ a Wesleyan preacher noted in his diary that "...such an affecting, appalling, disgusting, execrable scene my eyes never saw - God forbid they should ere behold the like again..."⁶⁴

After being left to hang for the customary one hour, the bodies were cut down and delivered to Mr Robinson the Chief Protector of Aborigines, absent from the hanging, for interment in the Aboriginal Cemetery adjoining the Melbourne Cemetery. The

⁶⁰ *Port Phillip Herald*, *op.cit.*, 21st January 1842

⁶¹ *ibid.*,

⁶² Turnbull, *op.cit.*, p.216

⁶³ The same James Dredge originally appointed as an Assistant Protector of Aborigines in 1839, Dredge resigned his position after making public criticism of Robinson's methods and character.

⁶⁴ Dredge, James. *Diary of James Dredge*, 20th January 1842. Melbourne. MS 5244, Box 16/4. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. pp. 218-222

spectacle over, the crowd slowly filtered away, many for a fortifying 'nip' whilst recounting the morning's events. There remained however, other witnesses to the hanging, members of the local Yarra Yarra tribe who had silently watched the proceedings from the tops of the nearby trees. Dredge finalised his diary entry with the observation that the execution rendered that day "...awfully notorious in the history of this Settlement..." and that the "...Judge of all earth..." would not only deal with those executed but also with "...those through whose neglect they have finished their course on the gallows...".⁶⁵ This last sentence was clearly aimed at George Augustus Robinson under whom James Dredge had previously worked as an Assistant Protector for Aborigines.

After the execution, the bodies of Pevay and Tim.me were interred in the Aboriginal graveyard, now the site of Melbourne's Victoria Market.⁶⁶ Condemned to the pitiless and cheerless institution of Wybalenna, Truganini, Matilda and Fanny were made the personal responsibility of Robinson until they were sent back to Flinders Island on the 6 July 1842 on board the *Adelaide*.⁶⁷ Woorady, who had been in poor health for some time, died during the voyage and was buried on Green Island.⁶⁸ The *Adelaide* disembarked her unwilling passengers at Wybalenna on the 16 July and were met by the settlement's new administrator Dr. Henry Jeanneret. The survivors of Pevay's band were far from subdued by their Victorian experience and it was not long before Jeanneret had cause to complain of their "...intractable nature...".⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 218 - 222

⁶⁶ Roberts, Jan. *op.cit.*, p.94

⁶⁷ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.113

⁶⁸ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.787

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.140

The Aborigines disliked Jeanneret's regime as many of his policies were universally unpopular, such as his removal of their children to be sent to Orphan School in Hobart and his expectation that the Aborigines should work for nothing more than the receipt of their normal rations. The returning Aborigines from Port Phillip came with a new sense of confidence and assertiveness and were unwilling to accept Jeanneret's paternalism unchallenged. On one occasion, Jeanneret stopped the issue of tobacco and sugar as rewards, only to be confronted by a near total strike for his pains.⁷⁰ In 1844 Jeanneret was dismissed and replaced by Joseph Milligan, and the Aborigines' situation improved under the new administration. However, on hearing the news that Jeanneret was about to be reinstated, a prominent group of Aborigines drew up a petition to Queen Victoria with Milligan's approval and the assistance of the catechist Robert Clark. The presentation of the petition was opportune, coming at a time when the plight of the Flinders Island Aborigines was gaining some public notoriety in London by courtesy of the Quakers:

It is with feelings of much sorrow that the Committee advert to the Aborigines of Van Dieman's Land. These natives, in 1834, were all (excepting four persons) driven, by order of the Government, from their hunting grounds to Flinder's Island, and we find, by the latest accounts, are now reduced to but a small remnant, of fifty-seven persons...and remarkable, it appears, for their shrewdness, natural sagacity, and benevolence, will, in all probability, in the course of a few years, be numbered among the extinct nations. It will then be impossible for the unprejudiced and reflecting mind to study their history without arriving at the conclusion, that a simple but noble-minded race have been consigned to a premature grave, by a nations professing to be guided by the principles of that religion which breathes "peace on earth and good-will to men;" but whose conduct, in reference to these untutored inhabitants of the forest, it

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.141

is impossible to reconcile with feelings of humanity, or even with principles of justice and sound policy.⁷¹

The primary purpose of the petition was simply to ask that Dr. Jeanneret not be allowed to return to Flinders Island and was signed by eight Aborigines on behalf of the Flinders Island community.⁷²

Walter G. Arthur
Chief of the Ben Lomond Tribe
John Allen
David Bruny
Neptune

King Alexander
Augustus
King Tippo
Washington

On receiving news of the petition, Jeanneret responded by claiming that the whole exercise was a personal attack on him, motivated and instigated by Milligan and Clark.⁷³ However, a subsequent enquiry into the validity of the petition by the Launceston port officer Matthew Friend, found it to be authentic and that some of the charges levelled at Jeanneret were well founded.⁷⁴ Reynolds notes that apart from the complaints against Jeanneret, the petition also contained a number of other important features previously overlooked. The document reveals that the signatories considered themselves to be free people, who had voluntarily come to Flinders Island after entering into an arrangement with Robinson, which for their part they had honoured.⁷⁵ They were also clearly under the impression that Robinson was acting in close

⁷¹ Aborigines Committee or The Meeting for Sufferings, *Further Information Respecting The Aborigines, Tracts relative to the Aborigines. Volume. 8.* London, Harvey and Darton. 1842.

⁷² Reynolds, Henry. *Fate of a Free People. op.cit.*, p.9

⁷³ Clark and Jeanneret had been at odds since Jeanneret accused Clark of cruel treatment and neglect of the Aboriginal children under his care. Clark admitted to having flogged the girls, but pleaded that he done it in religious anger at their moral offences. see Fowler. R.M. *op.cit.*, p.240

⁷⁴ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.202

⁷⁵ It is interesting to note, that none of the North West or Western tribal members who were taken by force to Flinders Island were signatories to the petition.

collaboration with Governor Arthur. These sincerely held convictions indicate that for some tribes at least,⁷⁶ the transfer to Flinders Island was the result of some negotiated agreement. The prevalence of these views may be evidenced as early as 1835 when Nickolls noted that the Aborigines at the settlement had:

...evinced an ardent desire to become scholars like white men, and for that purpose have voluntarily come forward and attend the catechist, where they are taught upon slates their letters upon Bell's system, and it is very pleasing to observe the progress some of them are making; their object is to write to their "Governor Father in Hobart Town" that is the Lieutenant Governor whom they are anxious to induce to remove them to their native land. They would be perfectly wretched were they certain they should die here. They all ardently wish to be removed, which delusion has been practised upon them I conclude for the purpose of keeping them quiet. Since my sojourn amongst them I have carefully abstained from all promises on the subject, or even any allusion to such an event...⁷⁷

The perpetrator of any such delusion amongst the Aborigines, as Nickolls would have been well aware, could only have been Robinson. The most likely feature of any such agreement or promise, being an assurance that the move to Flinders Island was to be of a temporary nature only, a point that has already been discussed. The apparent ease with which Robinson was able to convince so many Aborigines to freely go off into captivity has been a question that has vexed many writers. Suggestions have ranged from Robinson's latent powers of mesmerism⁷⁸ to his effective use of Truganini and the Mission blacks as "...mere decoy ducks...".⁷⁹ Leaving notions of Robinson's hypnotic powers and those that characterise the mission Aborigines as simple unthinking dupes aside, there is little doubt that Robinson's success was largely

⁷⁶ It may have been in reference to such an agreement that Walter Arthur saw relevance in signing himself as Chief of the Ben Lomond Tribe.

⁷⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.85

⁷⁸ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.27

⁷⁹ Calder. J.E. *op.cit.*, p.23

due to the negotiating skills of his Aboriginal aides. Truganini's role in these negotiations has come under a great deal of scrutiny, along with the charge that she aided in the dispossession and destruction of her own people. In her latter years it is reported that some Aborigines taunted her by saying that because of her assistance to the Friendly Mission "...she would live to be the last of them as a punishment for that action..."⁸⁰ However, accusations of this sort overlook the fact that the Van Diemen's Land Aborigines were organised as individual tribes, not as a cohesive nation. Mannalargenna, given Robinson's assurances that his countrymen would be allowed to remain on their own lands, no doubt thought that he was acting in the best interests of his tribe when he assisted Robinson on the West coast. Similarly, Truganini, after witnessing the demise of her own tribe on Bruny Island, probably thought that Robinson's offer was the best option for survival for those Aborigines still left in the bush. Unfortunately, while we do not know the exact nature of the assurances that accompanied each individual set of negotiations, we do know that Robinson was negotiating from a position of strength. By the time the Friendly Mission met up with tribal Aborigines, the destruction of traditional cultural patterns was complete, and the wretched circumstances to which they had been reduced⁸¹ meant that the desperate chieftains were ready to grasp at any hope for the future that was offered, no matter how slim the prospects. It is from this despair that Robinson derived his persuasive authority.

By 1847, the numbers of Aborigines at Wybalenna had reduced to the point that the Colonial Office and Lieutenant Governor Denison were obliged to close the

⁸⁰ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Truganini: Queen or Traitor? op.cit.*, p.116

⁸¹ As mentioned earlier on p.184 the Big River and Oyster Bay tribes had been reduced to a total of 26 members before they first met Robinson.

settlement. In a well publicised speech to the Legislative Council on the 20 June, Denison proposed removing the entire settlement to a place near Hobart convenient for regular inspection and supervision. Denison cited the cost of maintaining a remote settlement, the diminishing number of Aborigines and the deliverance of the "...unfortunate beings..." from the "...caprice..." of Jeanneret as his reasons.⁸² Denison closed his address with the controversial proposition:

...should the longing after that state of unrestricted freedom so dear to the savage, still lead them to wish to be released from the slight restraint to which it is proposed to subject them - I think they might be allowed to reassume their old habits of life, without any risk to the colonists...

Jeanneret was then again dismissed on 5 May 1847 and Milligan appointed to supervise the transfer of the remaining Aborigines to a deserted penal station at Oyster Cove about thirty kilometres from Hobart.⁸³

Denison's speech ensured that the move would not be without public debate. Wedge wrote to the Colonial Secretary to protest at the move and at a public meeting in Launceston "...fears were expressed that the Aborigines would once more rampage through the country, dealing out death and destruction..."⁸⁴ The *Launceston Examiner* commented:

Sir William Denison, in direct opposition to the prayers of the colonists, has decided on restoring these unfortunate savages to the scenes they formerly deluged with blood.⁸⁵

⁸² Supplement to the *Hobart Town Advertiser* 20 July 1847.

⁸³ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.202

⁸⁴ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.169

⁸⁵ *Launceston Examiner*, 2 October 1847. Volume VI, No. 551

On the 15 October 1847, the schooner *The Sisters* conveyed the entire Flinders Island population of just forty six Aborigines⁸⁶ (see Appendix 10 for North West names) to Oyster Cove, prompting Denison to answer his alarmist critics:

...The mountain is delivered of a mouse indeed - these murderous men who were to slaughter the whole of the Inhabitants of VDL having dwindled to 14 of whom 7 are unwilling or unable to act in any way painfully...⁸⁷

Of the Aborigines who made the move, only six were from the North Western tribes, One woman Amelia (Kit.te.wer) a Tarkiner, three boys Charley (Pen.ne.moo.noop.er) a Peterndic, Amelia's son Moriarty (born on Flinders Island) and Eugene's son Adam (born on Flinders Island), two men Eugene (Nicermenic) from Circular Head and Frederick (Pallooruc) a Tommeginer. The move to the Oyster Cove, a station recently abandoned for failure to meet convict health standards, did little to arrest the decline in Aboriginal numbers. Initially there was some cause for optimism when the Chief Secretary James Bicheno with the active support of Denison had the buildings refurbished and cleaned and Clark established some productive vegetable gardens for the Aborigines.⁸⁸ Bishop Nixon paid regular pastoral visits to the station while the Denisons not only visited but in turn invited the Aborigines to picnics at Government House. However, in 1850 events took a turn for the worse, Clark died and the gardens became neglected, the Aboriginal death rate started to climb with five deaths in quick succession, Milligan went North for two months on a hunting trip and the Bishop's visits ceased owing to poor health. The novelty of Oyster Cove was beginning to wear thin and interest in the station and its inhabitants began to wane.

⁸⁶ The remaining Aborigines consisted of 14 men, 22 women, 5 boys and 5 girls.

⁸⁷ Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.175

⁸⁸ Cree, Nicholas. *Oyster Cove*. Latrobe, Geneva Press. 1979. p.38

In 1851, following the closure of the Port Phillip Protectorate, Robinson paid a visit to Van Diemen's Land and made an inspection of Oyster Cove⁸⁹ prior to his return to England. Truganini, Matilda and Fanny were among the thirty Aborigines still living at the time of his visit; with the death of Eugene in 1849 the North West numbers had been reduced to four.⁹⁰ Moriarty died not long after Robinson's visit in March 1852, and owing to the poor state of records of deaths at Oyster Cove there are no dates for the deaths of Amelia, Charley and Frederick except that there is good reason to assume that they died sometime between 1851 and 1855.⁹¹ Eugene's inappropriately named son Adam,⁹² died on 28 October 1857, and with no other survivors, his death brought the story of those eight tribes that occupied the North West region to an unlamented and unrecorded end.

⁸⁹ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Black Robinson. op.cit.*, p.253

⁹⁰ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Truganini: Queen or Traitor?. op.cit.*, p.125

⁹¹ Plomley notes that these names were among the fifteen unaccounted for persons who didn't appear in the visitors book between 1855 and 1869. see Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.945 By 1862, there were only two Aborigines left alive at Oyster Cove, Truganini and William Lanne. William Lanne, considered to be the last male Aborigine died in February of that year.

⁹² Adam's mother was Tare.noo.tair.er also known as Sarah or Tibb a Cape Portland women kidnapped by the sealer James Parish and later sold to John Smith for four seal skins.

Postscript

From the stand point of the North West Aboriginal tribes there was very little to choose between the Sealers, the VDL Co and the Colonial Administration. None of the Europeans acknowledged, respected, or paid any heed to their traditions and with their lands forfeit, they held none of the rights or status due to free sovereign nations. It is true to say that the sealer's activities¹ were routinely condemned and eventually curtailed by both the Administration and by Robinson who argued:

...Surely this is the African slave trade in miniature, and the voice of reason as well as humanity loudly calls for its abolition...²

However, in a perverse sort of way, in the very act of exploiting the Aborigines, the sealers were the only Europeans to ascribe any value to their existence at all.

Curr, despite encouragement from his London Directors and the ready example of Dawson and AAC, made no attempt to establish any relationship or come to any accommodation with those he was actively dispossessing. In common with other pastoralists in Van Diemen's Land, Curr wanted their cleared hunting grounds to graze his stock and their forests for timber. In addition to these immediately available resources, the VDL Co also had long term plans to place hundreds of immigrant tenants on fifty acre blocks.³ This scheme was designed to ensure that

¹ The demise of sealing in Bass Strait and replacement by the muttonbird feather industry provided little relief to the workload of those Aboriginal women abducted by sealers. Commander Stokes R.N commenting on the size of the feather trade in which the feather's were sold for 3d per pound, noted: "...The feathers of twenty birds weigh one pound; and the cargoes of two boats I saw, consisted of thirty bags, each weighing nearly thirty pounds - the spoil of eighteen thousand birds...". see Fowler. R.M. *op.cit.*, p.322

² Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.174.

³ Parker, Henry Walter. *Van Diemen's Land: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State: with Advice to Emigrants.* London. J. Cross. 1834

unsuspecting settlers were locked into a position of economic dependence on the Company, thus creating for the VDL Co an additional source of income at very little risk or cost to themselves.⁴ Curr, unlike his Directors, could see no room in this world for the Aborigines.

The need to provide protection for the increasing numbers of settlers establishing holdings in the newer and more remote districts, placed great demands on the limited resources of the Colonial Administration. As a consequence, apart from supporting Robinson's Friendly Mission, scope for developing new initiatives in Aboriginal Policy was severely restricted. Aboriginal resistance to European settlement had intensified throughout the colony and the ongoing conflict had only served to highlight the unlawful nature of the dispossession. The inability of the law to legitimately engage with people who were clearly not British - having no rights to serve on a jury, or to appear as witnesses in their own right - was proving to be a constant source of embarrassment for the government. The many atrocities, both real and rumoured, that accompanied the Black War also served to entrench any negative racial stereotypes that existed amongst the early settlers, thus further limiting policy options available to Arthur's administration.⁵ This rapid deterioration in the little trust that had existed between the two races, also convinced many in authority of the unlikelihood that Aborigines would ever be peacefully incorporated into colonial life.

⁴ The English barrister Henry Parker, after reviewing the VDLC's proposal and terms offered to prospective emigrants, advised: "...I do not, however, wish to be understood as recommending emigrants to accede to them; for the Company, or rather its agents there, have it in their power to beggar, at any moment, the man who accepts the terms offered...". see Parker, Henry Walter. *op.cit.*, p.212

⁵ Desailly, Bronwyn. *op.cit.*, p.iii. makes the point that inherent racist views arose when the settlers needed to justify dispossession as settlement proceeded apace in 1826. Desailly argued that the reality of dispossession encouraged the growth of racism in colonial attitudes, with a new portrayal of Aborigines as being "inherently barbaric, treacherous and savage, fit only for extermination".

There was little prospect, given these political currents, that Curr and his influential London backers, would be seriously pressured by the local administration to make provision for the protection and preservation of the North West tribes.

If, as Jean Paul Sartre maintained, what men are, depends on the age and not on a human nature, many of the early settlers' views on race were those that served the function of underpinning and legitimising the activities of slavery and Empire. Although this was an era before the development of the theories of Social Darwinism and notions of the Aryan Race, some of these early attitudes qualified as racism in the modern sense, as an ideology, particularly if one adopts Hannah Arendt's understanding of racism as:

The word 'race' in racism does not signify any genuine curiosity about the human races as a field for scientific exploration, but is the 'idea' by which the movement of history is explained as one consistent process...Racism is the belief that there is a motion inherent in the very idea of race, just as deism is the belief that a motion is inherent in the very notion of God.⁶

By the time Van Diemen's Land was first settled, English views on race and colour were firmly established, having been formulated and accepted over a long period of involvement in the slave trade. The 1667 *Act to regulate the Negroes on the British plantations* defined Africans as "...of wild, barbarous and savage nature..."⁷ and by 1680, one English prelate was moved to comment: "...The two words *negro* and *slave*..." have "...by custom grown homogeneous and convertible..."⁸ The English clergy did little to oppose either the introduction of slavery or the ideas that

⁶ Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego. A Harvest Book. 1979. p.469

⁷ Sears, Stephen (ed.) *History of the British Empire*. New York, American Heritage Publishing Co. Inc. 1973. p.179

⁸ Berlin, Ira. op.cit., p.97

underpinned the trade. The Anglican hierarchy were more often found providing support for the practise, as in the case of the Bishop of Rochester who felt compelled to justify the appalling conditions that slaves endured during the 'middle passage'.⁹

The Bishop informed the House of Lords in 1799 that:

...There is a great peculiarity in the negro constitution: that it is particularly conducive to the health of the negro to be close shut up in foul air. This is death to us white men as we know...but for your negro, it is the reverse. Keep him hot enough he will always do well; and the better, the more you try to stifle him...¹⁰

The Bishop's speech was presented around the same time that Bass and Flinders were transiting Bass Strait in the *Norfolk*. The subject of slavery held more than spiritual interest for Anglican Bishops. On the abolition of slavery the British Government was required to pay out some £20 million to those financially disadvantaged by the Bill. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, whose members included the Archbishop of York, the owner of two slave plantations in Barbados, received £8,823.8s.9d as their share of compensation.¹¹ Therefore, it should come as no surprise to find that the Anglican Church provided little, if any, advocacy on behalf of the Tasmanian Aborigines in the early days of the colony. John Harris argued that the Anglican Church conducted its business as though the Aborigines did not exist, their souls apparently not worth saving. Commenting on the Anglican Church's lack of interest in the welfare of the Tasmanian Aborigines he noted:

⁹ Ira Berlin provides the example of the *Venus* that left Africa packed with 450 slaves in April 1729, only 363 reached the Mississippi River. Another forty-three succumbed before they disembarked in New Orleans. According to officials, the remaining slaves were so disease-ridden that "more than two-thirds of those who were sold at auction into the hands of the inhabitants...died" soon after. see Berlin, Ira. *op.cit.*, p. 83

¹⁰ Yeboah, Samuel Kennedy. *The Ideology of Racism*. London. Hansib Publishing Ltd. 1988. p.44

¹¹ Morris, James. *op.cit.*, p.20

The Church's failure was not the result of its efforts, nor a lack of success...The failure was in not even trying.¹²

To compound matters, the establishment church had not only benefited financially from slavery, but had also sought to provide many of the arguments used to legitimise the trade. However, the traditional Catholic doctrine of monogenesis and the accompanying notion of degeneration proved to be a serious obstacle in this regard for the Protestant churches. The theory of degeneration proposed that after the Flood, Noah's children dispersed to populate the world. Through isolated and separate development many of these groups gradually forgot their true origins and descended into barbarism. This theory provided a theologically sound explanation for the differences between savages and civilised man. With all humanity descended from a common father how could slavery be justified? It could only be justified if the slaves were a very different kind of people. Hence the arrival of polygenesis, a theory that proposed multi-human origins, a theory tailor made for those who needed to justify the practice of slavery. The proponents of this innovative notion found it convenient to revisit the 'Great Chain of Being' and classify 'other' races as lower elements in a scale of species that ranged from 'brutal savages' up to the nobler European [white] specimens.¹³ In fact the Creator had conveniently assisted the classifiers by providing a physical index based on colour and other physical traits. Another popular doctrine that was used to support slavery but didn't directly challenge the monogenesis theory was that of the pre-Adamites. This position argued that God created other races before Adam and Eve, and as these races were inferior

¹² Harris, John. *One Blood*. Sutherland. An Albatross Book. 1994. p.94

¹³ Davies, Alan. *Infected Christianity: A Study of Modern Racism*. Quebec, McGill-Queens University Press. 1997. p.11

by design (prototypes) they could be enslaved.¹⁴ A common biblical source used to substantiate this theory may be found in Genesis 1:28

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. [KJV]

In this chapter, a man and a woman are given dominion over every living thing, but it is not until the second chapter that there is any mention of the creation of Adam and Eve. Therefore, a race of people must have existed before Adam and Eve and it was from this race that Cain had chosen his wife when expelled for the murder of Abel. It was these pre-Adamite races from whom the natives of Africa, Asia, and the New World were descended. The creator of this theory, La Peyrère, narrowly escaped being burnt at the stake for heresy only by recanting and converting to Catholicism.¹⁵ Voltaire, no friend of the Catholic Church had also attacked the Jesuit's defense of monogenesis in his *Traité de métaphysique* (1734) by declaring that no matter what was said by:

a man dressed in a long black cassock...bearded whites, fuzzy negroes, the long-maned yellow races and beardless men are not descended from the same man.¹⁶

In the English-speaking world, relatively enlightened thinkers continued to regard coloured races as being inferior well into the twentieth century, Thomas Jefferson

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.13

¹⁵ Gossett, Thomas. F., *Race: The History of an Idea in America*. New York. Oxford University Press. 1997. 15

¹⁶ Poliakov, Leon. *The Aryan Myth*. New York. Barnes & Noble. 1996. p.175

(1743 -1826), despite his long-standing and intimate relationship with Sally Hemings,¹⁷ still chose to describe coloured people simply in terms of their economic function as slaves:

...a woman who brings a child every two years [is] more profitable than the best man on the farm [for] what she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labor disappears in mere consumption...¹⁸

While Rousseau was extolling the values of fraternity and idealising the 'Noble Savage', his British contemporary and (for a time) friend, David Hume, was writing on a very different theme:

I am to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites...there are NEGROE slaves dispersed all over EUROPE, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.¹⁹

With the advent of the Enlightenment, the sciences began to play an increasingly important role in the race debate. The eighteenth century Dutch anatomist Peter Camper revived Aristotle's correlation of facial and cranial shapes to human temperament as part of this movement. With an eye to the hierarchical order of the Great Chain Camper noted: "...It is amusing to contemplate an arrangement of [skulls], placed in a regular succession: apes, oranges, negroes, the skull of an

¹⁷ Sally Hemings was one of Jefferson's household slaves who bore him four children, the Hemings were the only slaves out of the 267 he owned in 1822, that were granted freedom in Jefferson's will

¹⁸ Berlin, Ira. *op.cit.*, p. 127

¹⁹ Davies, Alan. *op.cit.*, p.13

Hottentot, Madagascar, Chinese, Moguller, Calmuck, and divers Europeans..."²⁰

However, it was Cuvier, a member of the committee of the Institut de France that planned Baudin's expedition to Van Diemen's Land, who proposed the link between culture and biology that was to form the future basis of scientific racism. Cuvier was adamant that the differences in culture were a direct result of the biological characteristics of different races.²¹

In the United States, pre-Adamite doctrines continued to hold sway with the support of paleontologist Samuel Morton (1799 - 1841). Morton not only agreed that different races had different origins but put forward the idea that superior races had larger craniums. The larger cranium of the Caucasian (white or Adamic) implied a larger brain thus better mind and a demonstration of racial superiority. Morton illustrated his theory by arranging skulls taken from his five basic races on a descending scale based upon the amount of lead shot each skull could hold. As was expected the negroid skulls (American Golgotha) took their place at bottom of the scale having the smallest cranium capacity.²² This new found fascination with skulls as indicators of racial superiority, potential missing links in the 'Great Chain of Being' or evidence for polygenesis partly explains the interest, sometimes bordering on obsession, for acquiring Aboriginal skulls in Van Diemen's Land.²³

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.12

²¹ *ibid.*, p.13. There was also another scientific current that confined its studies to describing biological differences, focusing on differences of degree and not differences in kind thus retaining the monogenist position. A central figure in this research was Blumenbach with his study *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa Liber* published in 1781. Blumenbach argued that humans were a single unitary species composed of five subdivisions or races: Caucasian (white), Mongolian (yellow), Ethiopian (black), American (red), and Malayan (brown). Blumenbach was supported by Kant and James Prichard who argued in his *Natural History of Man* that racial differences were purely biological not cultural and were only of significance to the scientist. see McConnochie, Hollinsworth and Pettman. *op.cit.*, pp. 12 -13

²² *ibid.*, p.15

²³ The practice of cremating the dead, common among Aborigines in Tasmania made the skulls all

Debates concerning race became a common feature of public discourse in Van Diemen's Land, fueled in the 1820s by succeeding waves of settlers who introduced new attitudes towards the Aborigines that clashed with more traditional ones. Throughout Britain, notions regarding the institution of slavery and race were undergoing vigorous challenge from Wilberforce, the Evangelicals and progressive elements amongst the Weslyans and Quakers. The Evangelicals along with the later Quakers and Weslyans took their guidance from Acts 17:26 "...And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...". While the Evangelicals were genuinely sympathetic to the physical suffering of the enslaved and exploited peoples of the Colonies, they held little respect for their culture. James Stephen talked of the "...barbarous and obscene rites of Hindoo superstition..." while the evangelical head of the East India Company Charles Grant hoped that:

...we might diffuse among their inhabitants, long sunk in darkness, vice and misery, the light and benign influence of well-regulated society, the improvements and comforts of active industry.²⁴

As loyal servants of the Empire they played an active part in promoting its interests and cause. With a spirituality tempered by a belief in the nobility and superiority of the Saxon Race,²⁵ they saw their role primarily as a 'civilising' one, spreading both the

the more valuable.

²⁴ Morris, James. *op cit.*, p.51

²⁵ The English notion of ethnic superiority was derived from the myths surrounding the Norman conquest of 1066. The Saxons unlike the Normans were believed to be an upright plain speaking honest people who valued political liberty and freedom. England was seen as a new Israel that had been enslaved by Norman tyrants. The English love of liberty was believed to have originated with the Saxon chieftains Hengist and Horsa carrying the sacred torch of freedom from Germany to England after the withdrawal of the Roman Legions. These myths were further refined in the nineteenth century by Charles Kingsley and Robert Knox. They had also excited a popular support that included luminaries such as David Hume and Disraeli as well as Thomas Arnold the head of Rugby School, a training ground for administrators and officers of the Empire. Knox viewed the monarchy as a Norman imposition on the Saxon people who would overthrow their shackles one day and "...as bearers of true progress in history..." would spread their influence throughout the world. Charles Wentworth Dilke enthusiastically prophesied in his *Greater Britain* that Saxons would soon dominate the "...cheaper peoples..." of the earth. Not only would English speaking nations reduce their rivals to the status of "...pygmies..." but:

bible and the benefits of Britannia's Rule. This sense of purpose and destiny gave the Evangelicals a preference for conciliation, and the 'civilising' function of mission establishments as the proper way to resolve the 'Aboriginal problem'. Arthur and Robinson, who ably represented this current view, had another example to follow, that of Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566). The writings of Las Casas were well known at the time, being translated into most European languages with sales only surpassed by the Bible.²⁶ The Spanish Bishop protested against the 'natural slave' designation for American Natives and warned that God "...will wreak his fury and anger against Spain some day for the unjust war against the American Indians...".²⁷ Las Casas finally won the argument that Indians should be baptised and not enslaved. In his *Apologética Historia* (Apologetic History) *de las Indias* (1530), ch. 48, Las Casas wrote what could have been the blueprint for the conciliation endeavours of Arthur's administration:

It clearly appears that there are no races in the world, however rude, uncultivated, barbarous, gross, or almost brutal they may be, who cannot be persuaded and brought to a good order and way of life, and made domestic, mild and tractable, provided...the method that is proper and natural to men is used; that is, love and gentleness and kindness.

Robinson, prior to his commercialisation, probably saw himself as a latter day Las Casas, noting in his journal during a moment of reflection:

The superior people, moving from one remarkable feat to another, will steadily plant the principles of Saxon liberty, 'so dear to the freedom of mankind' and Saxon political institutions among the 'dark-skinned' races.

See Alan Davies, *op.cit.*, pp. 73 - 75 and Poliakov, Leon. *The Aryan Myth*. New York. Barnes & Noble. 1996. p.231

²⁶ Blackburn, Robin. *op.cit.*, p.156

²⁷ Davies, Alan. *op.cit.*, p.9

I was actuated solely by a desire to serve the aborigines, to do them good to ameliorate their wretched conditions and raise them in the scale of civilisation.²⁸

Robinson also compared the suffering of the Aborigines unfavourably with those endured by the Indians under the Spanish.²⁹

The differing views on race in the colony often formed the basis for the deluge of advice presented to Arthur and the Aborigines Committee on how to deal with the 'Aboriginal problem'. Roderic O'Connor, the Land Commissioner, expressed grave doubts whether those "...sable assailants..." who "...delight in perpetuating the most dreadful barbarities....murdering with one hand, while in the act of receiving Bread with the other..." were really capable of being conciliated. After lamenting the fact that the influence of the Anti-Slavery movement had precluded the adoption of the same means that the "...Spaniards took to destroy the Aborigines of South America..." O'Connor then asked Arthur:

How then is it possible to conciliate those who become more brutal in proportion to the kindness shown them. Nothing but fear operates on such Savages.³⁰

These traditional sentiments were countered by submissions of a more enlightened nature, such as that provided by Dr. William Paton the Assistant Surgeon, who made it abundantly clear at the beginning of his letter to Arthur that he subscribed to the view that: "...god hath made of one flesh all nations...", in other words a supporter of the monogenesis rather than the polygenesis school of thought. Paton, who was also an ardent phrenologist, used the example of an Aboriginal boy under his care, to

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.53

²⁹ Plomley, N.J.B. *Friendly Mission. op.cit.*, p.276

³⁰ Letter from Roderic O'Connor to Arthur. 11 December 1827. AOT CSO 1/2/15 pp. 63-75

develop a forceful argument against those who believed Aborigines were "...incapable of conciliation..." or of improvement in "...the moral sentiments and the useful arts..."³¹ However, not all colonialists were caught up in this debate. Curr's attitudes towards the Aborigines have been well covered, and they had very little to do with theology. Robinson recorded a short exploratory dialogue that he had with Curr on the subject:

In conversation with Mr Curr I said that a man who had Christianity would have morality. He replied that a man who would cut my throat might be a Christian.³²

Despite Arthur's genuine sympathies for the Aborigines' plight, his hand was stayed by his duty and function as Lieutenant Governor, an office that could not countenance any obstruction to Britannia's political or economic interests. Interests that included the taking of Aboriginal hunting grounds to supply the nation's wool industry, forests to maintain the Crown's Navy and creeks and mountains for potential mineral wealth, a position very little different to that of Edward Curr and the VDL Co. As Shaw observed, when the Colonial Office:

...instructed their colonial governors to conciliate the natives by treating them kindly, it invariably pursued or authorised policies that made conciliation impossible...³³

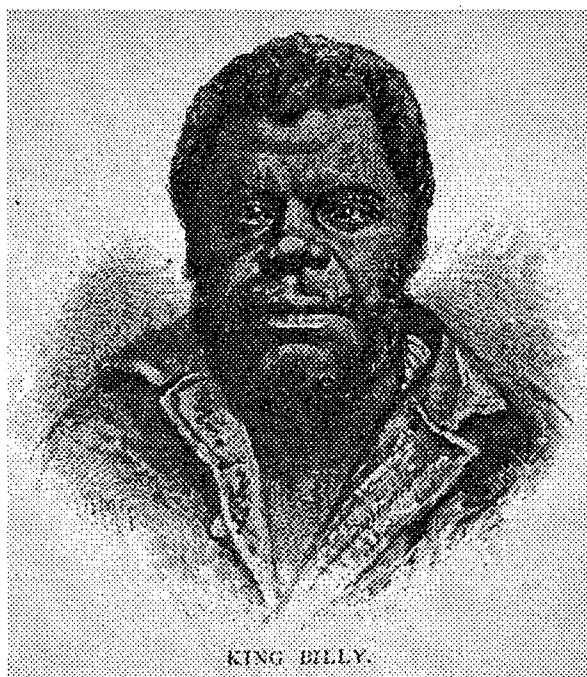
Thus, whether exposed to the violence of Curr's regime or falling under the protection of the Colonial administration, the end result for the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land was inevitably the same, the latter point illustrated only too well by the fate of William Lanney and his family.

³¹ Letter from Paton to Arthur. 15 October 1824. AOT CSO 1/2/15

³² *ibid.*, p.196

³³ Shaw. A.G.L. *op.cit.*, Introduction.

While the Lanney family were not from the North West tribes, they were nonetheless, resident in those lands at the time of capture, and, as a consequence have become an important element in the history of that region. Although not taken into captivity until December 1842, both parents, their daughter and three of their sons had died by 1847. Of the three remaining brothers, Barney (Barnaby Rudge) and Albert (Charley) were taken to Oyster Cove where they died within four years and William was sent to Orphan School in Hobart. In 1855, William along with Adam and Jack Allen from Oyster Cove was sent to be apprenticed to whaling ships. Despite being a heavy drinker, William still took an active interest in the welfare of the remaining Aborigines at Oyster Cove, lodging an official complaint regarding their inadequate rations with the colonial secretary in 1864.³⁴ On leave from his ship on the 3 March 1869, William became ill at his lodgings in Hobart and died, his body placed in the dead-house to await burial.



Portrait of William Lanney entitled: **King Billy**.
Artist Unknown., 1886. State Library of Tasmania

³⁴ Ryan, Lyndall. *op.cit.*, p.214

Neglected, ignored and sidelined while living, Aborigines had become an object of extreme scientific interest once dead. The desirability of Aboriginal skulls and the bizarre lengths people would go in order to obtain them is well illustrated by the treatment of William Lanney's body, reputed to be that of the last male full blood Aborigine. The Colonial Secretary, Sir Richard Dry, aware of the value placed on skeletal remains ordered the Resident Medical Officer of the General Hospital, Dr. G. Stokell to take care of the body and ensure that it was not interfered with in any way. It was commonly understood that the burial itself was only a temporary measure, after a decent amount of time had elapsed the body would be exhumed and added to the collection of the Royal Society of Tasmania.³⁵ The Society had a female skeleton in its collection but no male. However, one of the honorary doctors at the Hospital Dr. W.L. Crowther wanted the skeleton to send to his friend Sir William Flower at the Royal College of Surgeons in London. After informing the Colonial Secretary of his wishes, Sir Richard Dry wrote to the Royal Society suggesting that they may like to waive their rights in the matter. The Society in return reaffirmed their intention of adding William Lanney's skeleton to their collection. Not to be outdone, Dr. Crowther, his medical student son and the hospital barber, crept into the dead-house in the early hours of the morning and stole Lanney's skull. This was achieved by slitting open the skin around the head and neck in order to remove the skull, then the body of a white person nearby was beheaded and his skull removed in a similar fashion. The white person's skull was then placed under William Lanney's scalp and the skin sewn up. Unfortunately for Crowther, Dr. Stokell discovered the ruse when inspecting the coffin the next morning. Determined to obtain something for the Royal Society's collection, Dr. Stokell cut the hands and feet from Lanney's body

³⁵ Rae-Ellis, Vivienne. *Trucanini. Queen or Traitor?*. Canberra. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. 1981. p.136

and presented them to Society member John Graves. The following day the funeral took place and once the body was in the grave and safe from prying eyes Dr. Stokell returned under the cover of darkness to claim the rest of the remains. The body was removed from the coffin, placed in a sack and taken to a remote part of the hospital after reburying the coffin and tidying up the grave site. Shortly after Dr. Stokell's party had finished in the grave yard, Dr. Crowther's men arrived intent on the same purpose, they were disappointed to find the coffin empty save for the white man's skull.³⁶ The next morning Constable Mahoney found the grave disturbed and the white man's skull that held no interest lying on the surface.³⁷ Once made public the whole issue became the subject of a series of charges and counter charges between the rival parties, as well as the source of much outrage from the wider public, leading to Crowther's permanent suspension by the authorities. This callous and disrespectful treatment of Lanney's body also became an issue of great concern for Truganini as she perceptively feared a similar fate on her own death. As the death of Adam in 1857 was to mark the end of the North West tribes, the death of William Lanney severed an Aboriginal connection with the North West lands that had persisted intact and unbroken for millennia.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.138

³⁷ Turnbull, Clive. *Black War*. Melbourne, Lansdowne Press Pty Ltd. 1965. p.235

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Abbreviations

AOT	Archives of Tasmania. Hobart.
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office, Van Diemens Land
HRA	Historical Records of Australia
HRL	Hellyer Regional Library
VDL	Van Diemens Land
VDLC	Van Diemens Land Company

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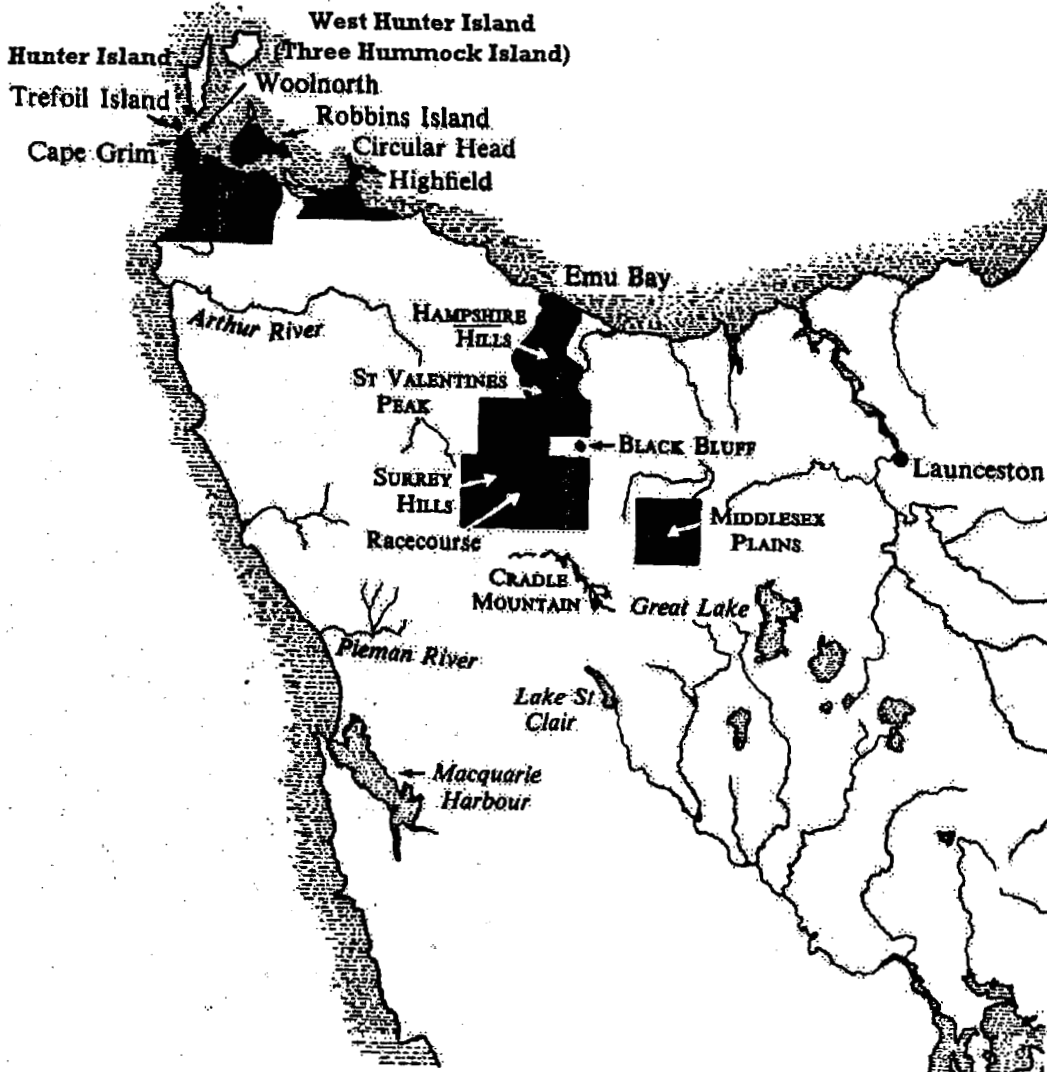
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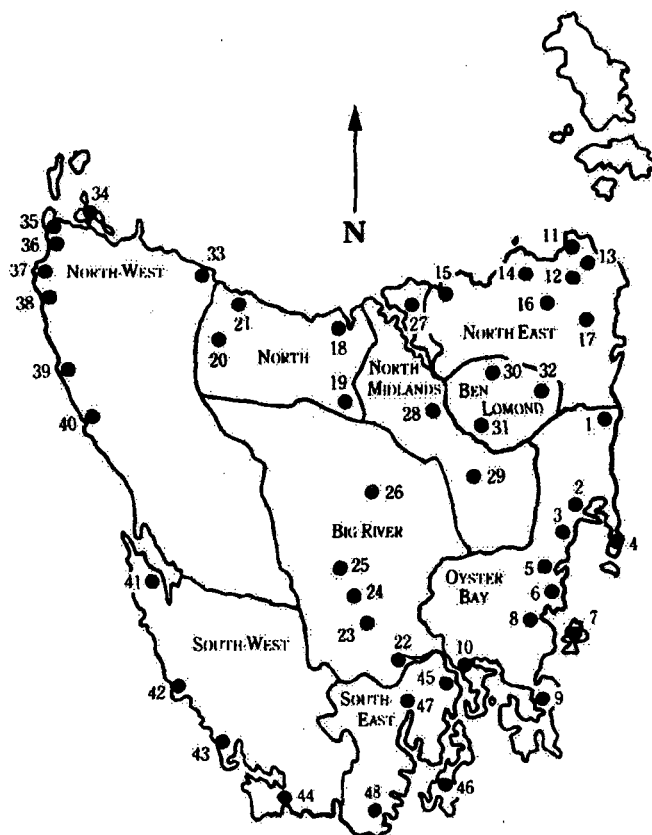
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Appendix One

Van Diemen's Land Company Land Grants



Van Diemens Land Tribes, bands and their territories



Oyster Bay Tribe

Bands:

- 1 Leeter-maire-mener—St Patricks Head
- 2 Linete-mairener—North Moulting Lagoon
- 3 Loon-titeler-maire-lehoinner—North Oyster Bay
- 4 Toorerno-maire-mener—Schouten Passage
- 5 Pore-dareme—Little Swanport
- 6 Lare-maire-mener—Grindstone Bay
- 7 Tyrod-deme—Maria Island
- 8 Port-maire-mener—Prosser River
- 9 Pydai-terme—Tasman Peninsula
- 10 Moo-maire-mener—Pittwater, Risdon

North-East Tribe

Bands:

- 11 Trawl-wool-way—Cape Portland
- 12 Leener-rerter—uncertain
- 13 Pinter-rairer—uncertain
- 14 Peeber-ranger—uncertain
- 15 Pyem-maire-nener-pairener—Piper River
- 16 Leeneth-mairener—uncertain
- 17 Panpe-kanner—uncertain

North Tribe

Bands:

- 18 Punniler-panner—Port Sorell
- 19 Pallit-torre—Quamby Bluff
- 20 Noe-teller—Hampshire Hills
- 21 Plair-heke-hiller-plue—Emu Bay

Big River Tribe

Bands:

- 22 Leenow-wenne—New Norfolk
- 23 Panger-ninghe—Clyde-Derwent junction
- 24 Brayl-wunyer—Ouse and Dee rivers
- 25 Lar-mairene—West of Dee
- 26 Luger-mairener-pairer—Great Lake

North Midlands Tribe

Bands:

- 27 Leterre-mairener—Port Dalrymple
- 28 Pannin-her—Norfolk Plains
- 29 Tyerer-note-panner—Campbell Town

Ben Lomond

Bands:

- 30 Planger-maire-enner—uncertain
- 31 Plinder-maire-mener—uncertain
- 32 Tonener-weener-larmenne—uncertain

North-West Tribe

Bands:

- 33 Tomme-ginner—Table Cape
- 34 Parper-lohener—Robbins Island
- 35 Pennemuker—Cape Grim
- 36 Pendowte—Studland Bay
- 37 Pee-rapper—West Point
- 38 Manegin—Arthur River mouth
- 39 Tarkiner—Sandy Cape
- 40 Peterndic—Pieman River mouth

South-West Tribe

Bands:

- 41 Mimegin—Macquarie Harbour
- 42 Lowreene—Low Rocky Point
- 43 Ninene—Port Davey
- 44 Needwonee—Cox Bight

South-East Tribe

Bands:

- 45 Mouhe-neene—Hobart
- 46 Nuenone—Bruny Island
- 47 Melukerde—Huon River
- 48 Lylue-quonny—Recherche Bay

Appendix Three

Topographic map of the Inglis River area, showing Wynyard 66, the river, and various landmarks. The map includes a grid with coordinates 22-32 and 26-32. Key features include contour lines, a fish trap, midden sites, and a coastal reserve.

WYNYARD 66
WYNYARD

INGLIS RIVER

Fossil Bluff Coastal Reserve

Freestone Cove

Midden Sites

Fish Trap

200m.

Cemetery Reserve 0001

Cemetery Reserve 0002

Ingildale

Horwood

Private Road

Boundary follows river bank

0189, **0188**, **0172**, **0201**, **0202**, **0203**, **0207**, **0197**, **0198**, **0199**, **0200**

Wynyard

Midden Sites

WYNYARD 66
WYNYARD

INGLIS

RIVER

Freestone
Cove

FOSSIL BLUFF
COASTAL RESERVE

Fossi:

Wynyard

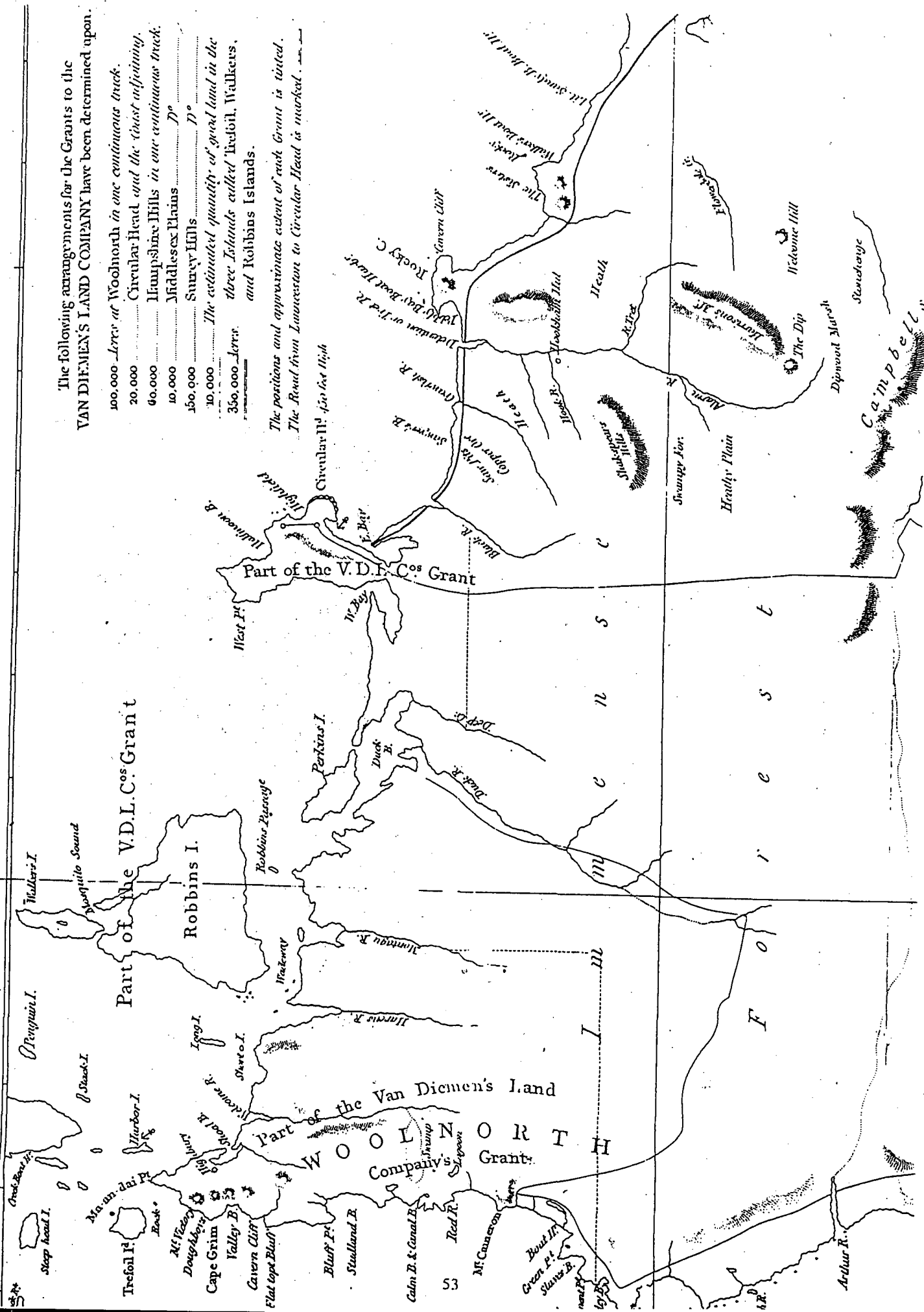


Appendix Five

The following arrangements for the Grants to the
VAN DIEMEN'S LAND COMPANY have been determined upon.

100,000	<i>Livee at Woolnorth in one continuous track.</i>
20,000	<i>Circular Head and the twist adjoining.</i>
40,000	<i>Leupshire Hills in one continuous track.</i>
10,000	<i>Middlesex Plains D°</i>
150,000	<i>Surry Hills D°</i>
10,000	<i>The estimated quantity of good land in the</i>
350,000	<i>three Islands called Trebil, Walkers,</i>
	<i>and Robbins Islands.</i>

The positions and approximate extent of each Grant is tinted. The Rowd from Louwerston to Circular Head is marked.

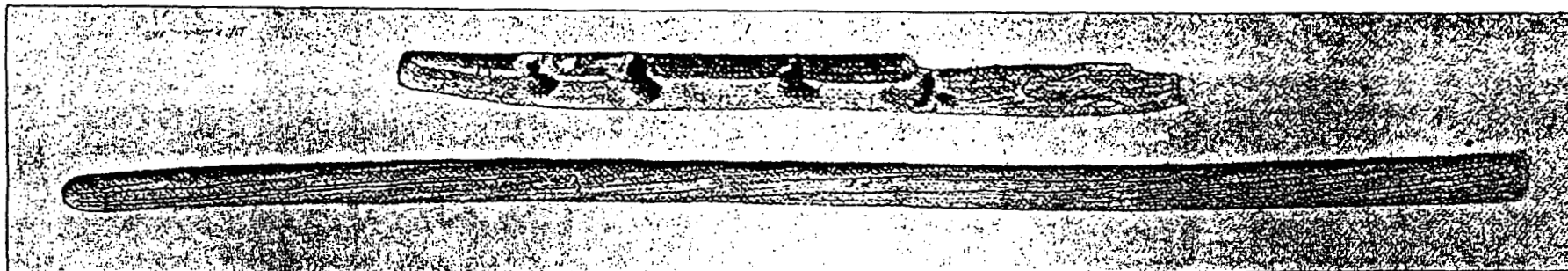


H. LING ROTH.—ABORIGINES OF TASMANIA.

To face Page 83.



TASMANIAN FIRE DRILL AND SOCKET STICK FROM SIR JOHN LUBBOCK'S "PRE-HISTORIC TIMES." THESE STICKS WERE PRESENTED TO SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, BART., F.R.S., BY G. A. ROBINSON.



TASMANIAN FIRE DRILL AND SOCKET STICK IN THE PITT-RIVERS' MUSEUM, OXFORD PRESENTED BY GENERAL PITT-RIVERS, F.R.S., WHO OBTAINED THEM FROM THE COLLECTION OF BARNARD DAVIS.

(See Appendix H).

Appendix Seven

Aboriginal Place Names - North West Tasmania	
Ry.er.ter.pee	A point of inlet at eastern end of Anthony Beach
Tangatema	Albatross Island
Roy.he.mun Tunganrick	Arthur River
Pobe.ber.lib.er.bur.ic	Bears Island off Three Hummock Island
Tar.tow.yer.rem.ne.roun Neen.mur.rick	Bird Island in the Hunter Group
Pate.ten.ne.rone.wong.he Poin.rud.dic	Black River
Par.tal.leel.er	Black River - the point at the East inlet on the west side.
Nar.moo.row.er.dim	Bluff Hill - Arthur River Entrance. Small unnamed river between Bluff Hill and Australian Point
Pat.ten.gara	Boat Harbour
Pare.toy.lare	Boat Harbour - Western Point at the Cave
Moot.te.way.nart.ye Pee.wun.gar Tee.rul.ler Ill.rang.gar	Cam River near Coast Cam River - Inland
Tade.rick.er	Cape Elie - point of Robbins Island opp. Circular Head
Kennaook Lag.gen.ner May.ger.re Mine.dim.mer Pellree Pilni	Cape Grim
Nar.kar	Cape Grim - Cave in the northern face of Suicide Bay
Rarn.er.bun.dine.moon	Cape Grim - Victory Hill
Rarn.ne.bim	Cape Grim - Point opposite Victory Hill
Tore.her.bone.ner	Cape Keraudren, Three Hummock Island
Maluta Moo.nat.re.ker Mue (Mul). nar.ti.lare Trang.dim	Circular Head
Par.er.me.nuck Ren.nuck	Cliff top at North End of Studland Bay
Loe.meet.ter	Davidsons Bay nr Woolnorth
Marn.he.lud.ic	Davidsons Point at Cape Grim
Mane.drang.er Ry.boon.er (lare) Tee.er.lore	Detention River
Kan.in.er.wid.ic Kar.rer.noo.tong Koin.drim Lay.hoon.ner Rarn.ner.me.dim	Doughboy Islands (Inner Island) Doughboy Islands (Outer Island) Doughboy Islands Doughboy Islands Doughboy Islands

Appendix Seven

Ree.her	Duck Bay
Dry.er.der.bee	Duck Bay - a long point at the NW entrance
Pane.long.ger	Duck Bay - Griffiths Point Point to the West side of
Pan.er.er	Duck Bay between it and Perkins Island
Tee.be.lor.de.ker	Duck Bay north east entrance (Eagle Point)
Pan.ner.rer	Duck Bay - Pelican Point
Ly.kone.no	Duck River
More.ze.zan.ner.kil.le.bue.le	
Kee.me.pling.er	Duck River (Northern Branch)
Tee.be.lor.de.ker	Eagle Point NE entrance to Duck Bay
Parm.ban.no	Eastern Inlet, Circular Head
Table Bunna	Eastern Tier
Pan.lung.er	Fentons Creek, Smithton
Pen.ner.wood.de.ker	Fossil Bluff
Mebbelek	Frenchman's Cap
Trul.len.nuer	
Tore.rer.pin.druck	Green Point near Mount Cameron West
Ty.ber.luck.er	
Py.re.min.par.dud.dic	Greenes Point - North of Kenneth Bay Marrawah
Tid.de.ger.lang.Roun	Grummet Island - Macquarie Harbour
Pare.her.boke	Harcus River
Kar.ne.ket.tel.lay	Hellyer River
Pane.run.er	Henty River - the first river north of Macquarie Heads
Ware.he.be.nuke	Hunter Island (West Hunter Island)
Way.ner.meen.nuke	
Wore.ner.been.be.you.er	
Reeneka	
Dray.woon.er	Hunter Island - area around the boat harbour on the eastern side of the northern end.
Tare.he.num.neep	
Tid.dee.been.er	Hunter Island - Boat River, Ainslie Beach
Rum.mer.wine.did.ic	Hunter Island - Rocky Boat Harbour/Little Duck Bay,
Ly.be.lap	Hunter Island - Homestead Lagoon
Lar.rap.pee	Inglis River
Par.mone.er	
Ple.luke.her.we	
Pay.then.woo.de.ker	
Par.mone.er	
Ple.luke.her.we	
Lar.hope.pe	
Pen.lung.ger	Inglis River Estuary
Parralaongtek	Kemps Bay
Poe.ger.ly	Macquarie Harbour
Tow.wen.ric	Macquarie Harbour - Birchs Inlet
Tow.wen.ric	Macquarie Heads
Roin.bow.er	Maxies Point, 2.4 kms NW of Mount Cameron
Pare.he.tud.he.yac	Montague River
Pun.ner.dare.re.me	Mosquito Island (Walker Island)

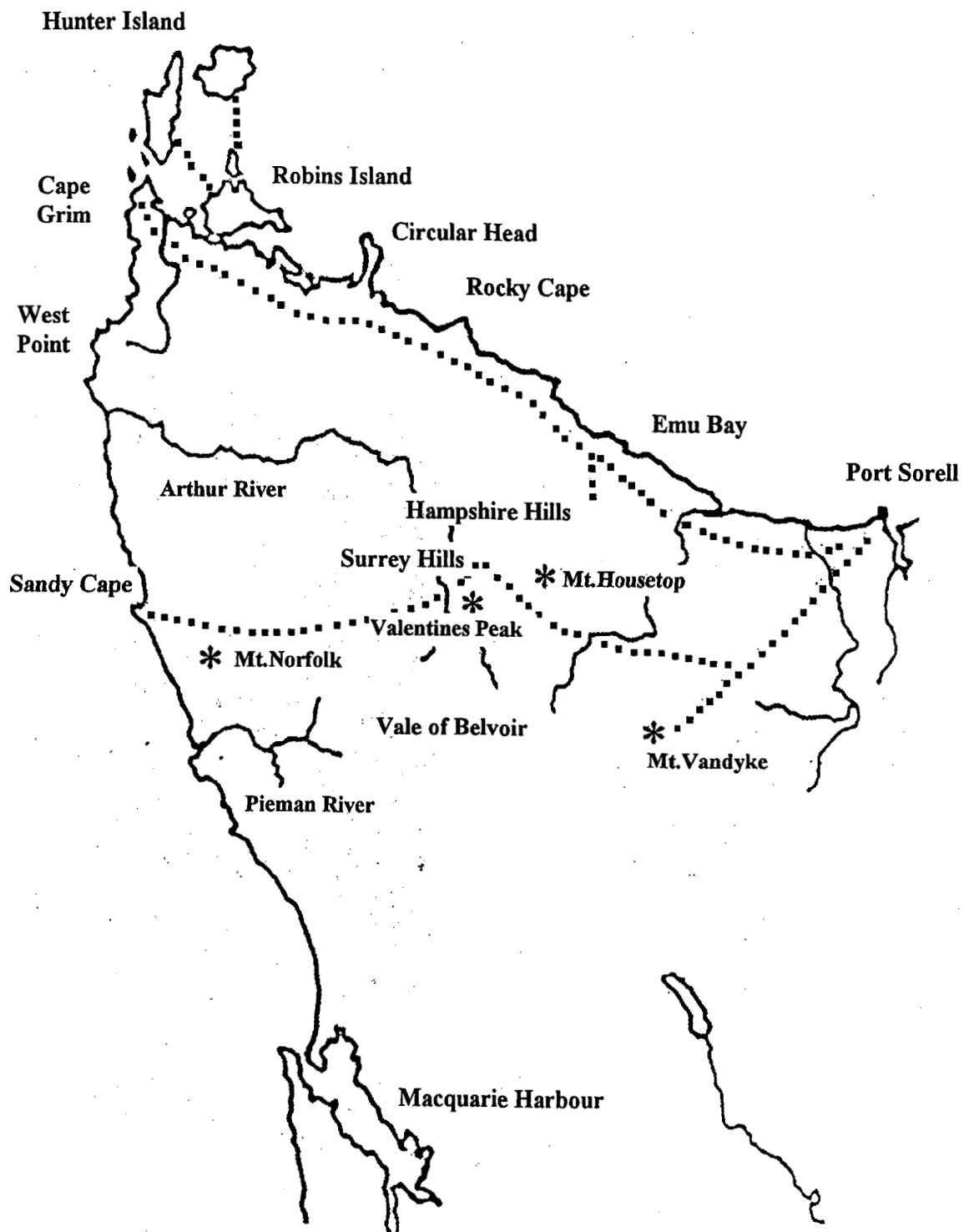
Appendix Seven

Kare.he.bun Ny.pooner	Mount Balfour
Par.ten.na.ma.na	Mount Bischoff
Preminghana Tar.ne.you.er Wab.ber.rick.ker	Mount Cameron West
Roeinrim Traaoota Munatta	Mount Heemskirk
Be.wal.lay	Mount Ramsay
Poin.er.rud.dick	Pavement Point, Marrawah
More.reen.dupe	Penguin Islet off Hunter Island
Par.ter.tuth.er.pel.luke.er.de	Perkins Channel, Duck Bay
Tone.ner.war.ker.ren Drore.rore.rer	Perkins Island Perkins Island in the Hunter Group tr. Grassy place.
Pun.drim Ta.rore.rer	Petrel Island, Hunter Group
Lid.dy.wy.deve Par.loo.dur.rick Roy.en.rim May.woo.rim	Pieman River
Tom.me.nupe	Place nr. Blue Bog N. of Mt Cameron West
Tab.lab.ber.re.nuke	Region between Green Pt. and Montague River
Tone.dud.de.ker	Richardsons Point 24 km N of Sandy Cape
Ree.wer	River running out of lagoon 1.2 km NW of Mount Cameron
Pade.re.ker Pil.le.de.ker Tar.way	Robbins Island
Mal.le.hoo.loo.ker	Robbins Island - Elie Cape
Dray.dar.ric	Robbins Island (Sealers Springs western end of Robbins passage) tr. Place of water.
Tree.nur.re.wur	Robbins Passage
Koy.bun.dy Tang.dim.mer Tarn.er.day Wee.you	Rocky Cape
Tay.rim	Sandy beach between Bluff Hill Point and West Point
Hoin.nun.ruck Pan.ne.ne.er.noke.er Pare.rid.de.ker Num.dre.cow.rip.per	Sandy Cape
Lang.er.rare.roune	Sarah Island
Tree.er.mid.de.ker	Sealers Springs, West side of Robbins Island
Teem.non.doo.her	Shell Creek, southern end Three Mile Sand
Run.ner.boor.rike	Shell Islets east of Shoal Inlet at Woolnorth
Tare.he.num.neep Dray.woon.ner	Shepherds Bay, Hunter Island

Appendix Seven

Kartee Oyare Pay.en.wood.ic	Sisters Creek
Moun.roune.er	Sisters Creek - Bush area surrounding
Ly.run.te	Sisters Island
Way.nen.de	Site of " <i>Highfield</i> " Stanley
Num.did.de.mo.he.dope.her Numdidermohedope	Site of Aboriginal settlement on West Side of Hunter Island South of Perigo Point
Pee.ber.lic.er	South Point of Three Hummock Island
Rowerlin	Stack Island
Pay.ter.tun.ne.yac	Studland Bay (Bluff Point)
Lar.er.mo.wine.drum	Studland Bay - Waterfall at
Hoo.more.re.ker	Suicide Bay area Woolnorth - "where the people where shot by the shepherds"
Lar.rer.tore.rone Roe.noun Waterbim	Sundown Point, South of Arthur River
Time.le.ner Toin.be.noke	Table Cape
Par.rap.pe	Table Cape - Wet Cave Point
Noe.part.rick	Three Hummock Island (East Hunter Island)
Pang.er.moon.er	Three Mile Sand - campsite at southern end next to a creek - West of Marrawah
Purreka	Tract of Coast between Detention River and Circular Head
Tade.de.mer	Trefoil Island
Wong.ger.rim	Two Mile Sand between Mount Cameron and Cape Grim
Trow.wer.line.er	Walker Island (Mosquito Island)
Por.er.ko.yoin.dur.ic	Wallaby Point, Hunter Island
Leen.dim.roo.er Ron.de.re.mode.ric.er	Welcome River
Tem.men.wow.de.ker	Welcome River - Cottage at head of
Tee.pleer	West Inlet S of Circular Head
Non.gor.ger.ner Tang.er.dim.me	West Point (The South-east Point) West Point
Par.rap.pe	Wet Cave Point - High rocky point West and near Sisters Creek
Tane.ner.you.er	Woolnorth - Cliff at Suicide Bay
Lay.rim.noke Tem.dud.he.ker	Woolnorth Point

Appendix Eight



Tribal Migration Patterns

Appendix Nine

Statement of Thomas Watson Storekeeper for VDLC

17 December 1829¹

The information of Thomas Watson of Emu Bay in Van Diemens Land taken upon Oath before me one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for Van Diemens Land and its Dependencies this Seventeenth day of December in the year of our Lord One thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty Nine. Which said informant on his Oath aforesaid deposeth and saith as follows (that is to say) I was living at Emu Bay on the 21st August last past. Richard Sweetling who is an assigned Servant of the Van Diemens Land Company said to me in answer to a question that I put to him that he had struck a Native Black Woman with an Axe on that day. I heard Nathaniel Russell say that he fired a Gun at a Black Native, the same Native that Sweetling afterwards struck with an axe. He said that the Native's back was to him at the time he fired and he thought from the size it was a lad. Mr Goldie was present at some part of this conversation with Russell. It was immediately after they came home bringing two Prisoners with them. John Palliser was also present at that conversation. I have heard Palliser say that he was present when the woman was shot, but I never heard him say that he took any part in killing her. At the conversation above mentioned when Mr Goldie, Russell and Palliser, and some other people were present Palliser said that Mr Goldie was away in the bush when the woman was shot, and that in coming back when heard someone cry "Kill her", he Mr Goldie cried out "Don't kill her", or "Don't strike her". I have asked Sweetling questions about this, and he told me that when Mr Goldie cried out "Don't kill her" he had the axe lifted, and was striking and could not save the blow. He did not hear Mr Goldie cry out, but the words were repeated to him by someone else, and then it was too late to save the

¹ From a paper lodged with the Local History Collection, HRL, Burnie.

Appendix Nine

blow. He might have said that he heard Mr Goldie also, but I am not sure. I understand from Palliser and Russell that the Woman was dead before they came away from her. No person came here for arms previous to the woman being killed. Mr Goldie had no arms when he went away from here on the morning of that day. Neither had Palliser or Sweetling. Russell had a Gun I saw him return with it. I was told by the persons who were present when the woman was killed, that it took place about three miles and half westward of this place, upon the coast. Mr Goldie has related to me the history of this occurrence which agrees with the accounts given by the other men, as above deposed by me, in every particular. Mr Goldie stated that he left the men to build a temporary sheep shed, and went a little further west to look at the pasture, that near the end of Plain he saw a Smoke in a Scrub and on advancing a little he saw two or three of the Natives, that he then returned to the men, told them what he had seen, and added, that he thought they might be made prisoners of, that the men then left their work, one of them, Sweetling, taking his axe, and Russell his Gun, and approached the place where the Natives were. I did not understand that Mr Goldie gave the men orders to go, but merely mentioned the Natives were there and though they might make them Prisoners. When the party approached the scrub, as Mr Goldie further informed me, the Natives attempted to make off, Mr Goldie pursued one and succeeded in taking her. I think Mr Goldie said he did not know it was a woman until he took her. He states that on coming out of the scrub with the woman he had taken, he heard a Gun fired and then called out to the men, not to kill the Native, then she was struck with the axe on the side of the Neck, and that only one blow was given, and that he did not think she could have recovered from the Gunshot wound. I saw two Natives brought as Prisoners to this place the day the woman was

Appendix Nine

stated to have been killed, one was a woman and the other a Girl about four or five years of age. The little girl, Russell said, was by the woman when he fired, but he did not see her when he fired. Sweetling, when he acknowledged that he struck the woman with the axe said he was so agitated at the time he did not know what he was doing and that if he had had time to reflect he did not think he could have done it.

signed. Thomas Watson

Appendix 10

The following Table¹ lists those Aborigines closely associated with the North West Region recorded as taken captive, in the main by Cottrell, McKay, Parish, Robinson George and George Jun., ex Launceston Gaol, ex Sealers. The six women listed with Kangaroo Island as their final destination were those women kidnapped by sealers from Cape Grim in 1820.

Name(s)	Gender	Date of Capture	Recorded Place of death	Actual date when known
Adam (son of Nicermenic)	M	Born on FI 7/8/38	Oyster Cove	28/10/57
Ballewin Jacky (Omega)	M		Flinders Island	22/2/37
Care.reen	F	7/4/34	Flinders Island	
Coleweek (Cord.de.ve)	M	6/2/33	Flinders Island	
Cowndiderban	F	4/9/32	Flinders Island	
Emily	F	Born on FI	Flinders Island	October 1841
Go.ly.beek	F	12/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	18/7/33
Gone.nar (Daniel)	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	8/6/37
Hee.Deek Thomas	M	7/4/34	Flinders Island	20/4/41
Helen	F	Born on FI	Flinders Island	18/12/37
Hoy.ner.beve.hen.er	M	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	4/8/33
Kie.peker	F	1820	Kangaroo Island	
Kit.te.wer ² (Kit-hoop) (Amelia)	F	23/6/32	Oyster Cove	1851 - 1854
Koin.er.bare.ake	F	15/7/32	Hunter Island	1/10/32
Lar.er.me.mur.ic	F	28/2/34	Flinders Island	
Lar.mode.rick: (Deborah)	F	4/9/32	Flinders Island	3/3/38
Lar.ner.gow	F		Flinders Island	
Larpeeno.puric	F	1820	Kangaroo Island	
Larratong (Andromarche)	F	15/7/32	Flinders Island	16/8/37
Lawerick	F	4/9/32	Hunter Island	15/9/32
Lay.wood.een	F	15/7/32	Hunter Island	30/7/32
Lenergwin (Columbus)	M	7/4/34	Flinders Island	21/2/37
Let.te.low.he	M	22/9/30	Flinders Island	
Line.Bur.er.nic Tommeginer Chieftain	M	27/11/32	Flinders Island	
Lo.ter.brah (Lotabrah)	F	3/3/31	Flinders Island	
Loeth.dider.bope	M	7/4/34	Flinders Island	

¹ Of the ninety one Aborigines listed in the Table as being captured from the North West, sixty two survived to be transferred to Flinders Island and of that total only five remained alive to be sent on to Oyster Cove. The unusually large female presence in the Table is evidence of the limited impact of sealers in this region. After removing the six women known to have been abducted to Kangaroo Island and the other two women known to have been captured by sealers, Ruth and Nol.la.hal.la.ker (Little Kit) as well as allowing for those children born in captivity, the numbers still remain remarkably balanced with thirty seven females to forty two males. Walyer and her sisters No.em.dap.per and Tril.do.bor.er were resident with the sealers from time to time and their relationships with the sealers was of an ambiguous nature.

² Kit.te.wer's children born on Flinders Island are listed as Emily, Robert and Moriarty.

Appendix 10

Loy.de.bope infant of Toolleweek died at birth	F	Died at birth	Flinders Island	21/6/38
Ly.noon.gar	F	28/2/34	Flinders Island	9/2/37
Mohanna (Moy.he.nung)	F	22/7/33	Flinders Island	13/10/37
Moon.dap.per	F	1820	Kangaroo Island	
Moriarty	M	Born on FI	Oyster Cove	5/3/52
Nang.er.gor.ing	F	28/2/34	Flinders Island	
Narrucker	F	7/4/34	Flinders Island	
Naydip	F	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	11/8/33
Neen.no.hic (Matthew)	M	27/11/32	Flinders Island	March 1839
Nicermenic (Eugene)	M		Oyster Cove	27/28 May 1849
Nie.pee.kar	F	1820	Kangaroo Island	
No.bur.ic	M	6/2/33	Flinders Island	
No.em.dap.per	F		Gun Carriage Island	23/5/31
Noe.mine.ner. drick	F	15/7/32	Flinders Island	21/6/38
Noe.ne.doe.ric	F	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	4/8/33
Nol.la.hal.la.ker (Little Kit)(Sabina)	F	19/12/30	Flinders Island	3/3/39
Noring-bake (Gore.round.wad.dip)	F	14/3/34	Flinders Island	
Pade.de.bin	F	6/2/33	Flinders Island	
Pade.de.vene.he.noke	M	14/3/34	Flinders Island	
Pallooruc ((Frederick)	M	27/11/32	Oyster Cove	1851 - 1855
Pane.ne. moke	M	28/2/34	Flinders Island	
Pane.ne.more.roke (Buonoparte)	M	12/7/33	Flinders Island	9/9/37
Pannabuke (William Robinson)	M	19/6/32	Flinders Island	12/6/38
Par.le.wunner.ruc	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Par.lin (Hannibal)	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Par.ner.ry.ber.rid.dic.er	M	5/2/33	Flinders Island	
Par.pine.ner	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	14/6/33
Peerapper	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Pen.de.wur.re.wic (Benjamin)	M	27/11/32	Flinders Island	29/12/37
Penderoin (Pen.ne.moon)	M	23/6/32	Hobart	1835/6
Pendowtewer (Rodney)	M	1831	Flinders Island	4/8/38
Penenebope	M	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	2/8/33
Pennemoonoooper (Charley)	M		Oyster Cove	1851 - 1855
Pille (Pillah)	F		Flinders Island	25/10/37
Poredeboic (Pore.de.boik)	F	14/3/34	Flinders Island	
Py.boke (Tommy)	M	7/4/34	Flinders Island	30/3/37
Rac.er.dun.nupe	F	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Reetar.hibar	F	1820	Kangaroo Island	

Appendix 10

Robert	M	Born on FI	Flinders Island	2/9/38
Ruth (Rue) (F) abducted by John Morgan from Robbins Island in 1831 when 9 yrs of age and sold to John Williams (Norfolk Island Jack) a Sealer, resident in the Kent group. Williams had no issue.				
Ry.nu.wid.dic.er	M	28/2/34	Flinders Island	
Ryinrope ³ (Tay.rick) (Cleopatra)	F	4/9/32	Flinders Island	31/7/37
Tar.toy.en.ruc	M	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	1/8/33
Teddeheburic (Ted.de.he.bur.re.ker) (Clara)	F	22/7/33	Flinders Island	9/2/37
Tee.tore.ric (Wedge's boy)	M	1/5/28	Launceston	August 1830
Teen.ny	F	28/2/34	Flinders Island	
Tem.gare.rer	F	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	5/8/33
Tid.de.rap	F	12/7/33	Flinders Island	1/6/38
Time.e.deen	F	6/2/33	Flinders Island	
Toe.rid.ick	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Toin.de.bur.er	F	12/7/33	Flinders Island	
Tole.ler.duric (Andrew)	M	23/6/32	Flinders Island	
Tool.le.week	F	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Tor.he.wod.deker	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Tril.do.bor.rer	F		Gun Carriage Island	1831
Trob.ber.line.ne	M		Flinders Island	15/7/33
Troe.powerhear	F	1820	Kangaroo Island	
Tunner-miner-wait (Pevay) (Cape Grim Jack) (Napoleon)	M	21/6/30	Melbourne	20/1/42
Tybuner (Tybine)	M	15/7/32	Hunter Island	31/7/32
Ty-me-nid-ic (Adolphus)	M	15/7/32	England ⁴	
Walyer (Tare.nore)	F	19/12/30	Gun Carriage Island	5/6/31
Waw.rer.tore.rer	M	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	3/8/33
Wy.er.re (Wyeric)	F	12/7/33	Flinders Island	
Wy.yer.rer (Wy.ger.rer)	F	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	2/8/33
Wymerruck	M	15/7/32	Flinders Island	
Wyne	M	22/7/33	Macquarie Harbour	31/7/33

³ Ryinrope's child born on Flinders Island is listed as Helen

⁴ Ty.me.nid.ic was reported by Robert Clark as being sent to sea on the government vessel *Vansittart* and then joining an overseas vessel bound for England sometime in the late 1840s certainly after 1842. Plomley, unable to find any further trace of him concluded that he never returned to Van Diemen's Land. see Plomley, N.J.B. *Weep in Silence. op.cit.*, p.887